

THE WORLD'S LONGEST RUNNING MAGAZINE OF CULT ENTERTAINMENT

# STARBLDST



ISSUE  
404

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PREVIEW

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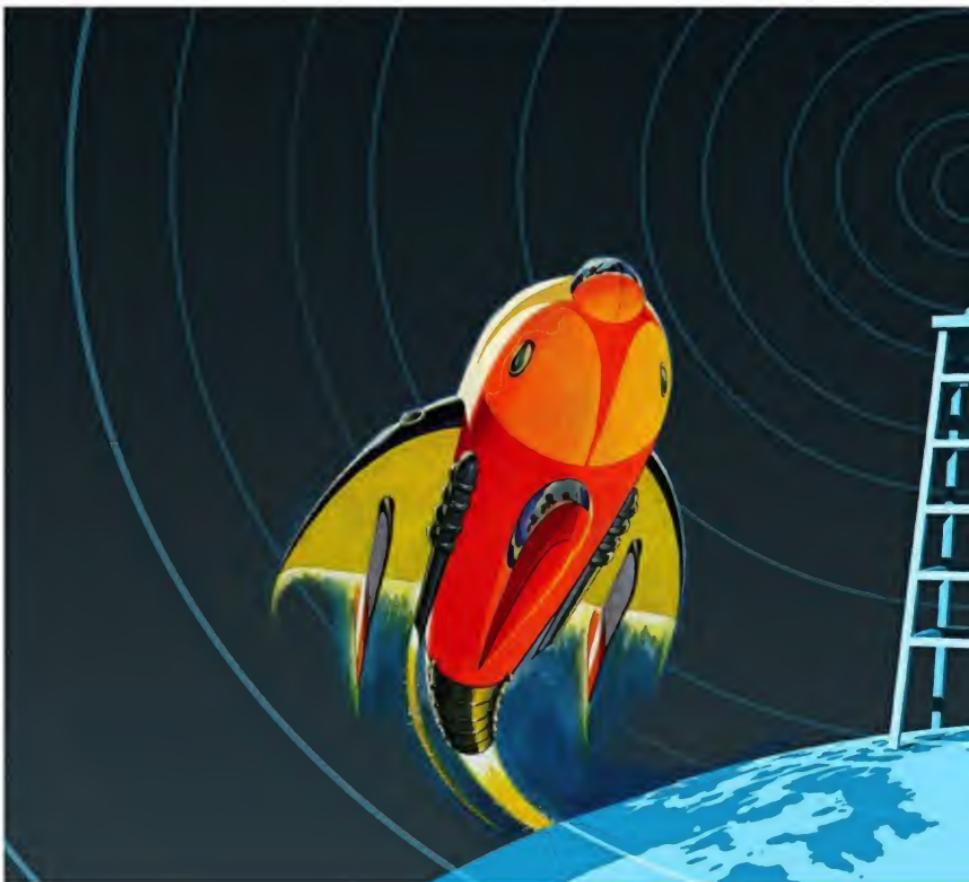
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24 HRS A DAY

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SEPTEMBER 2014

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## LIZARD

STARBURST HQ is grateful for the protection of our faithful lizard TETSUO. A reptile survivor from the iconic *Requiem of the '90s*, TETSUO remains vigilant to this day, upholding his promise to protect all humans from the ever-present threat of reptilian evil.

# EDITORIAL

Welcome to STARBURST Issue 404.

Seriously, how good was *Sin City*? Back in 2005 it captured the zeitgeist overnight and won over genre buffs and mainstream movie goers alike. Who would have thought it possible that a neo-noir anthology could survive at the box office, and be a critical success?

Even now the *Sin City* aesthetic is a potent jolt if you haven't watched it for awhile. It is that rare movie that is always as good as you remembered. A sequel was a given but it's been a tortuously long nine years of gestation. A long wait that is almost over, so what better way to prepare than to let STARBURST bring you up to speed and have a peek at what we can expect from *Sin City: A Dame To Kill For*.

With *Twin Peaks* revealing more of its mysteries, thanks to David Lynch finally getting that extra footage out via Blu-ray, we just couldn't resist compiling the top 10 weirdest moments from the show that defined the term "cult TV". I am childishly chuffed that my favourite scene made it to number 1!

This month's covers feature a rather risqué Ms. Green on our newsstand edition, and our ridiculously talented Mark Reihill takes you to his *Sin City* for our collectors' edition.

It's Only A Movie is back, and also in this issue we have our comprehensive genre TV preview, the first of our profiles on upcoming indie talent in Independents Day and much, much, more.

Until next time, keep watching the weird and wonderful...

Jordan M. Royce



# FEEDBACK

You can write to STARBURST via snail mail:  
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**BAYWATCH**

I very much enjoyed your coverage of the TMNT's rich history. One thing though, have you considered that the issue as a whole may in fact be superior to the upcoming Michael Bay-backed reboot? I am not a total Bay hater (In fact, I happened to

like the original *Transformers*, *Bad Boys* and *The Rock*), but we must remember that the last reboot Michael Bay was involved in was a *Nightmare on Elm Street*. Y'know, the one where Freddy looked like a burnt turtle!

Matt, BRADFORD

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# STAR

## SUPER(SAD)MAN

Just saw the picture of the Man of Steel on page 9 of your latest issue. Is it just me, or is Batman v Superman looking as depressing as a tramp who's just pissed his pants in front of you? Why so serious, indeed. Big Blue needs to pull out a big shit-eating grin. Do Warner Brothers not understand that Superman is a positive, bright, colourful character who gives hope to people? Batman, I get it (I even enjoyed the meme craze), but that isn't my Superman. Then again, that wasn't my Superman in *Man of Steel* either. Oh Superman's just levelled a city? Aw, it's fine, don't worry about it, we'll get the cleaners in.

Ben, via email

# LETTER

## PURPLE POWER

I like a geared-up Turtle warrior as much as the next geek, but my god, that limited edition cover... just awesome. In the words of Vickie Vale in Tim Burton's *Batman*, "oh I love purple". That is all.

Lizzie, via email

**Us too!** Thank you, we have Mr Paul Loudon ([www.pauloudon.com](http://www.pauloudon.com)) to thank for our delicious #403 collectors edition cover.

## GOOD GRIEF!

As much as I love the news that your mag brings me, why did you have to break the news of Dangermouse returning with an iPatch? Can we not just appreciate these classic shows for what they were rather than having to constantly revisit and redo classics? You can do what you want with certain shows, but surely the Cosgrove Hall classics need to be left alone.

Gary Rogers, MILTON KEYNES

It can be strange to see rebooted versions of beloved childhood shows, but I don't think we should be too precious. Some of them didn't actually last that long but had great concepts and can benefit from a revamp for the new generation. As long as they stick to ethos of the original show and done the right way we can enjoy them too! We'd like to see *Chorlton and the Wheelettes* back, or imagine *Jamie and the magic torch*? Trapdoor is another one!

## LIZARD LIKE

I have only just noticed that credit for Tetsuo the lizard in the mag; this really is what separates you from the rest. Brilliant. You don't see other movie magazines crediting lizards, thank you for standing up for all us reptilians out there!

Viserion, via email

It's always best to stay on the right side of our scaly friends, just ask David Icke.

## GAGA OVER SAGA

Whilst I am relatively new to STARBURST (with issue 395 being my first), I'm certain that I will be an avid reader for years to come. The passion for the science fiction medium, detailed reviews, and the deeply analytical and playfully quaint features (the TMNT merchandise overview springs to mind first) make for great reading. But most of all, as long as you continue to praise the ultimate sci-fi masterpiece, which needless to say is the Star Wars saga, (including the prequels - yes, even they are awesome!) then I'll continue to pay.

Scott, KEIGHLEY, WEST YORKS

We're all waiting anxiously for J.J. Abrams' inaugural episode too, but all the signs are looking good so far! You don't have to worry, there shall be no shortage of the 'Wars from our end!

## NASCHY BUSINESS

Your piece on Paul Naschy just gives horror fanatics like me even more reason to pick up your publication each and every month. Apart from out-and-out horror mags, you guys do some of the best horror coverage. And what the hell is *WolfCop*?! That looks all kinds of crazy, fury cool! Keep up the excellent coverage!

Suze, MIDDLESBOROUGH

Don't you mean co-fur-age? Ha! You can never have too many bad puns...

## PUN NERDS

'Gore Day, Mate'?! 'Turtle Recall', 'Claw and Order'. Oh STARBURST, you and your wonderful puns do make me smile.

Devon, via e-mail

...see what we mean!

## WRESTLEMANIAC

Loved reading Chris Jackson's Retro Bytes section in your

TMNT special. As a long time wrestling fan (it's still real to me, dammit!) who grew up on the brilliant Wrestlefest game, the feature was a fascinating read and I can't wait to check out part 2 in your next issue. Top work!

Thomas Dawson, SHEFFIELD

Well, enjoy it whilst you can, that's the closest you're ever gonna get to sports in this magazine! Turn to page 102 to enjoy part 2!

## BASKET CASE

Damn you, STARBURST! Everytime I look at your magazine I end up adding loadsa awesome stuff to my Amazon Wishlist, it's a dear do! Please can you review at least a few more stinkers next issue to give my bank balance a rest for one month.

Niall, via email

Sure thang Niall, check pages 30, 67, 70, 73, 75 and 78. The problem this month might be finding something else to push your basket over £99.99 to get FREE Super Saver Delivery!

## DRACULA UNTRD

I noticed that you mentioned *Dracula Untold* as something to look out for in the last issue. On your recommendation I watched the trailer and to be honest it was a huge pile of shite. Even the poster is rank! What gives?

Alan Reid, via email

To be fair, we actually said it could be worth checking out. 'Could'. The fact we were so none-committal should have clued you in, Alan.

## HAIR-RESTED DEVELOPMENT

Wolfcop looks like the dogs bollocks! I wonder if it will get a release when there's a full moon... it would be awesome to see it at the cinema but I suspect it will only be getting a limited release here but I'll be buying it right away. Wolfcop better be careful with his drink driving, if he gets pulled over, his drivers licence photo ain't gonna match...

STARBURST does not endorse drink driving, and recommends that all supernatural creatures wear their seatbelts... and humans too.

## CRÈME DE LA CRIM

With *The Expendables* 3 coming out and "Expendabefes" being rumoured. Who would be in

your "Expendables, but with bad guys" movie? Off the top of my head I'd have Michael Ironside, Malcolm McDowell, Alan Rickman and Hugo Weaving, with a Christopher Lee cameo. Do you have any suggestions?

David Whisman, via email

**The Expendabefes?** Sounds great! How about this guy from *Timecop*?

If you want Christopher Lee in it, they better hurry up! Readers, write in with your dream *Expendabefes* casts, and our favourite wif win some tat from the office.



## CUPBOARD LOVE

Great work with the TMNT special, 'Bursters. Imagine my surprise to see your magazine giving a shout out to the Turtles egg cup that's stashed at the back of my cupboard. Thanks for bringing back the memories!

Ant, BEDFORD

Yeah, sorry, hope we didn't make too much of a mess whilst we were in there. By the way, there's a tin of Minestrone back there that you might wanna throw out.

# twitter

## @STARBURST\_MAG

We said: "Oooooo!!! There's a new GOTHAM trailer just come out; who's looking forward to this show?"

You said:



# THINGS TO COME

A ROUND-UP OF THE  
BEST (AND WORST)  
OF THIS MONTH'S  
MOVIE / TV NEWS

## BATMAN V. SUPERMAN: DAWN OF JUSTICE



Despite us promising you last month that July's prestigious San Diego Comic-Con would surely reveal the secrets of the DC Cinematic Universe, it turns out Warner Bros weren't willing to divulge their full plans just yet. Booooo! They did debut a nifty pic of Xena: Warrior Princess Wonder Woman though - which you can see above - before blowing the roof off Hall H with an incredible *Dawn of Justice* teaser trailer - which you can see in shaky smartphone-vision on the internet. Probably. We haven't looked. Honest.

## MANIMAL

When we first reported on a big-screen reboot of '80s laughing stock *Manimal* all the way back in TTC 382, we actually thought it was destined to be one of those many projects we write about that never actually sees the light of day. Happily, we were wrong! It may have taken it almost two years to progress, but this month saw the film boarded by none other than Will Ferrell and his regular partner in crime, writer/director Adam McKay. Together, their Gary Sanchez production outfit will bring *Manimal* kicking and screaming into the 21st century by treating the premise with an appropriate level of irreverence. For those who didn't have the dubious pleasure of watching this charming eight-episode misfire back in '83, said concept saw wealthy doctor Jonathan Chase (Simon MacCorkindale) somehow being able to turn into any animal he wishes (budget depending), and choosing to use his goofy gift

to fight crime. (Like you wouldn't do the same.) Jay Martel and Ian Roberts, showrunners of popular sketch series *Key & Peele*, have been called upon to tackle screenplay duties, while Sony Pictures Animation will help bring the Manimal to life on screen via CG-wizardry. Ferrell hasn't been announced in the Chase role yet, but we all know it's just a matter of time.

In further Ferrell news, we also got word that the *Anchorman* star is in talks to play cult filmmaker Russ Meyer in *Russ & Roger Go Beyond*. The biopic will chronicle the mammary-obsessed moviemaker's misadventures as he shoots his first studio picture, 1970's *Beyond the Valley of the Dolls*, with then-screenwriter Roger Ebert. On the off chance the Ferrell casting comes to pass, we're laying claim to the *Faster, Pussycat! Kill! Kill!* headline in advance.

## THE EVIL DEAD

After far too many false starts, and in the interest of not getting the hopes up of the hardcore Deadheads amongst you, TTC last year silently took a blood oath to renounce all further *Evil Dead* 4 and/or *Army of Darkness* 2 movie rumours. And though we're admittedly about to tease you with the potential of seeing all new screen adventures of Bruce Campbell's Ash, technically we're still honouring that initial promise, because this time Sam Raimi has been telling far-too-gullible fans like ourselves that the project will now take the shape of a TV show. Campbell himself confirmed that plans are indeed afoot, and that he is very much involved. What with the medium playing host to so many great horror shows at the moment, it would certainly be a groovy thing to see the *Evil Dead* canon be serialized (imagine the story potential of that Deadite-ravaged, post-apocalyptic setting!), but having took Raimi at his word so many times before, we're not going to try and not get excited about this until it actually starts shooting. ...Nope, can't do it. This is the best damn news we've heard all year!

## KING KONG

Attack the Block's Joe Cornish has been targeted by Legendary Pictures to helm their newly announced big-screen reboot of the King Kong mythology, *Skull Island*. The powers that be have set aside a November 2016 release date for the project, meaning it will hit screens just eleven years after Peter Jackson's own, oft-derided remake.

Interestingly, the same production company recently secured the rights to feature iconic Toho monsters Rodan, Mothra and King Ghidorah in 2018's *Godzilla 2*, which will begin production once director Gareth Edwards wraps up his secret *Star Wars* standalone film. We like to think that these Legendary projects are intrinsically linked for an eventual *King Kong vs. Godzilla* rematch. There is an undeniable air of encroachment surrounding the classic 1962 product and here at STARBURST we recommend on keeping a firmly peeled eye on announcements to come. ts

## SHANNARA

In a quest to find its very own *Game of Thrones*, MTV has turned its attention to the annals of epic fantasy. For genre fans, Terry Brooks' immersive *Shannara* series will likely be a familiar title, and now *Thrones* fans the world over will get a look in. The show's been given a full ten-episode run based on the second book in the series, 1982's *The Elfstones of Shannara*.

Spearheaded by executive producer and *Iron Man* director Jon Favreau, alongside Al Gough and Miles Millar (the duo behind

*Smallville*), the initial two episodes of *Shannara* will be helmed by Jonathan Liebesman, the director behind this year's *TMNT* reboot.

Since fantasy has proved big business, nothing is sacrosanct and it's not just Brooks that's following in George R.R. Martin's footsteps, for Anne McCaffrey's popular *Dragonriders of Pern* book series is set to also swoop onto our screens (albeit this time in our multiplexes), courtesy of Warner Bros. While the franchise may seem out of touch by today's standards, it remains a cornerstone of fantasy, one that has been imitated many times over. Blending sci-fi and fantasy elements, *Pern* was concerned with dragonriders battling an airborne spore threatening the environment.

Warner Bros. exec Drew Crevello (who worked on the *X-Men* franchise) and producer Julia Sporri are involved in the development of the first *Dragonriders* film. While the project gained steam a few years ago, with X2 screenwriter David Hayter on board, it would seem it's now being built up from scratch.

Though *Shannara* and *Pern* may be more in the classic fantasy vein than HBO's history-inspired, ultra political behemoth, *GoT* may just have a few serious contenders to worry about in the near future. **dc**

## PAINKILLER JANE

Back in February, we brought news that plans had been put in motion to adapt violent action comic book *Painkiller Jane* for a movie outing. It's now been revealed that cult heroes Jen and Sylvia Soska have signed on to direct. No specific details have been released as yet, but a posting by Sylvia on the twins' Facebook page stated that it will feature, "the Jane you know right off the pages being brought to life." From this, we can presumably infer that the film will feature extreme violence, snarky dialogue and a badass gun-toting redhead wrapped in a scarlet leather trench coat and perpetually bloody bandages carving a relentless swathe of carnage through the criminal underworld.

After stunning and shocking the world in 2009 with their grindhouse exploitation flick debut *Dead Hooker in a Trunk*, the self-styled Twisted Twins leapt into underground prominence with 2012's feminist horror (or if you believe them, romantic comedy) *American Mary*. More recently, they've finished filming action film *Vendetta*, while their slasher sequel *See No Evil 2*, starring genre favourites Katharine Isabelle and Danielle Harris, is to be released later in the year. **AM**

## UNIVERSAL MONSTERS

Further to rumblings back in October, Universal Pictures have now confirmed they will be bringing back the 'good old monsters' of the Golden Age of horror cinema, and weaving them into a collective universe, a la Marvel Studios' MCU. The term Universal Monsters has gone into the lexicon of cinema to define the studio's films of the thirties to fifties. Hot properties Alex Kurtzman (*Transformers*, *Star Trek*) and Chris Morgan (*The Fast and the Furious*) have been tasked with presenting the classic characters such as The Wolfman, Frankenstein's Monster, Dracula, The Mummy and The Creature from the Black Lagoon for a modern age.

*The Mummy* is the first planned production, with Kurtzman at the helm and a newly announced release date of June 24th, 2016 now penciled in. The idea would be to build a franchise of monster flicks, with interconnectivity, which gives it more scope for the classic team-ups of yesteryear such as 1943's *Frankenstein Meets the Wolfman*.

Considering the last few attempts to revive the properties were as unwelcome as Dracula turning up at a blood bank (the less said about *Van Helsing* and *The Wolfman* the better), we can only hope that this time they get it right. **MU**

## TREMORS

In 1990, the original *Tremors* introduced the world to a new source of fear. No, not Kevin Bacon, but a congregation of subterranean monsters that munched their way through a small American town. It's now been revealed that, on the eve of the long-running franchise's 25th anniversary, filmmaker Don Michael Paul is readying himself to helm a reboot for Universal Pictures. The new

movie will lens in Johannesburg, South Africa, a location which has served as the setting for a number of great sci-fi films, most notably Neill Blomkamp's *District 9*.

Given the advancements in special effects over the last quarter of a decade, there's a real opportunity here to bring some ground-breaking (wink) creature designs to the *Tremors* universe; though whether or not the director behind such gems as *Jarhead 2: Field of Fire* and *Lake Placid: The Final Chapter* is actually up to the job remains to be seen. **os**

## WESTWORLD

A TV series based on Michael Crichton's 1973 cult classic has been rumoured for a full year now, but this month its moved considerably forward by securing the endless talents of Sir Anthony Hopkins! The Oscar-winning Welshman has been cast as Dr. Robert Ford, the creative director at Westworld who turns to unconventional measures in order to achieve his grand, robotic visions. (Funny how fellas named Bob Ford are usually swines of the highest order.) *True Blood's* Eva Rachel Wood has snatched another lead role in the show, portraying farm girl Dorothy Abernathy, a character who soon discovers that there's something not quite right about the world in which she lives. For starters, she's secretly a robot.

Produced by J.J. Abrams, the pilot for *Westworld* will be directed by Jonah Nolan (*Person of Interest*) and broadcast by industry titans HBO. **os**



Kevin Smith has finally unveiled the first poster (above) and trailer (above also, but only if you're reading this on one of those posh tablet things) for his twisted creature feature. And if that wasn't cool enough, the cult filmmaker also announced that *Tusk* would be the first film in what he's branding 'The True North Trilogy', a Canadian-set series of genre films that will comprise of the aforementioned Walrus horror flick, *Yoga Hosers* (superpowered teen girls), and *Moose Jaws*, which, based off the briefest details available, is exactly as it sounds... *Jaws*, but with a moose. (Anybody checked what kind of strain Kevin's smoking these days?)



## THE MARVEL CINEMATIC UNIVERSE

As Guardians of the Galaxy is currently doing great guns across the globe, up next for the Marvel Studios is Joss Whedon's *Avengers: Age of Ultron*. Plot details still remain relatively thin on the ground, although it seems that the crazed Ultron will be out for world peace in the movie. As he puts it though, the main thing stopping world peace is the human race... meaning we're all gonna have to bite the bullet for the world to spin in harmony. (Admittedly, he might just have a point.) But far cooler than the entire species being wiped out, we have now had our first look at the MCU's Ultron and he looks all kinds of badass. Not only that, but as you can see in the glorious concept art adjacent, we'll also be getting an army of Ultrons! A near-unstoppable genocidal robot who can upgrade himself wants Earth's Mightiest Heroes dead? You have to wonder what lies in store for our Avengers, with current rumours suggesting that not all of them may make it to the final credits...

After *Age of Ultron* gets released globally on May 1st, 2015 (April 24th for us lucky Brits!), it's time for the Peyton Reed-helmed *Ant-Man*. Just when the *Ant-Man* furor seemed to have settled, the movie has now gone and lost three cast members. Given how *Ant-Man*'s numbers only seemed to consist of eight in the first place, losing three guys is quite the hit on the film. The biggest loss is Patrick Wilson (*Watchmen*), rumoured to have been playing William Cross/Crossfire, with scheduling conflicts being cited as the reason for that departure. The other two names now out of the frame are Kevin Weisman (*Alias*) and newcomer Matt Gerard, who both had unknown roles and were apparently written out of the story during the latest batch of script rewrites. Still, despite these departures and the whole debacle over replacing Edgar Wright, *Ant-Man* is still said to be on track to kick-off Marvel's Phase Three on July 17th, 2015, and we also now have some more news on which characters will be appearing. We already know that Michael Douglas is playing Hank Pym and that Paul Rudd is playing Scott Lang, but now comes confirmation, as rumoured in last month's TTC, that

Corey Stoll (*The Strain*) will in fact be playing Darren Cross, Head of Cross Technological Industries, and that he will become the villain Yellowjacket, often a dark alter ego of Pym's. Similarly, it's been confirmed that Evangeline Lilly's unknown role will in fact be Hope Van Dyne. In the comics, there's Hope Pym, daughter of Hank Pym and Janet Van Dyne, aka Wasp, and she eventually becomes the supervillain Red Queen. How Ant-Man's Hope Van Dyne role plays out, we'll have to wait and see, although it does suggest that Janet Van Dyne does exist somewhere in the MCU.

Cinematically, the above rumblings are all definite, but it's often more fun to look at what else could be just around the corner. Marvel Studios has gone on record as confirming a whole host of release dates for currently unnamed projects. *Captain America 3*, to be directed by the returning Russo brothers and rumoured to be subtitled *The Fallen Son*, has long been confirmed for a May 6th, 2016 release, and we knew that two unconfirmed films will be released on July 8th, 2016 and May 5th, 2017, with Scott Derrickson's *Doctor Strange* (now with Joaquin Phoenix apparently the frontrunner to play the Sorcerer Supreme) said to have pinched the summer '16 date. It's now been revealed that another five slots have been booked up for Marvel Studios releases – July 28th, 2017; November 3rd, 2017; May 6th, 2018; November 2nd, 2018, and May 3rd, 2019. Oh how we rolled our eyes at the thought of Marvel Studios being cock-sure enough to make claims that they had plans in place right through until 2020!

Dates are one thing, but let's look at which films are possibilities to grab those release slots. Merely a week or two after the aforementioned dates were confirmed as booked in, James Gunn confirmed that he'll be returning to write and direct *Guardians of the Galaxy 2*, which will take the July 28th, 2017 date. It's more-or-less confirmed that we'll see a third *Thor* movie, so that will likely end up with one of these dates, then there's speculation that Black Panther may get brought into the MCU, that Ms. Marvel could appear in her own film, and the constant recurring Hulk movie rumours. Interestingly, this last month saw writer/director/actor David Hayter,

who worked on the screenplays for *X-Men*, *X-Men 2*, and *Watchmen*, confirm that he has a script ready to go for a Black Widow solo movie. Hayter was said to have been working on the project nearly a decade ago, and now he claims that if Marvel were to pull the trigger on a Widow solo film that all is in place for it to go into production sooner rather than later. Marvel have claimed they want to do a strong female-led movie for a while now, and with DC seemingly sowing the seeds for a Wonder Woman flick in the near future, they'd be wise to get in there first. With the Scarlett Johansson actioner Lucy recently triumphing over Dwayne Johnson's *Hercules* at the US box office, Black Widow surely can't be too far off now.

In addition to the previous rumours, Iron Man 4 is still a no at this stage. Robert Downey Jr. had a multiple-picture deal which ran out after Iron Man 3, although RDJ finally managed to agree terms on a two-picture return for *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *The Avengers 3* (a movie which will also take up one of the booked in release dates, most likely May 6th, 2018). Now whilst that is all well and good for Avengers fans, Downey Jr. has no Iron Man movies scheduled on his plate. When recently asked about a possible fourth Iron Man, Downey Jr. played it coy, suggesting he's open to it but that it's down to Marvel/Disney to make him the right offer. As well as that, though, he also played down the prospect of anybody else stepping in to play Tony Stark any time soon.

Stepping away from the big screen, Marvel Studios' TV shows have also seen some additions since last issue. Agent Carter will see some familiar faces behind the camera, with Anthony & Joe Russo (the brothers who directed Captain America: The Winter Soldier and are, as previously mentioned, already on board for Cap 3) helming episodes two and three of the Peggy-centric period piece. Captain America: The First Avenger's Joe Johnston is also apparently keen to tackle episode four if his schedule permits it. That show will be debuting during the mid-season break of Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D., which has also been busy this month. Xena herself, Lucy Lawless, will guest in the show's sophomore season, and will be joined by Quantum of Solace's Simon Kassianides, who has bagged himself a major recurring role. Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D. returns to US screens on September 23rd, with Agent Carter set to begin its eight-episode run in January of 2015.

And in some final MCU news, the Netflix-exclusive Daredevil has added Deborah Ann Woll and Peter Shinkoda to its cast. Woll (*True Blood's* Jessica Hamby) has been given the role of Karen Page, the apple of Matt Murdoch's eye, not to mention the secretary for Murdock and Foggy Nelson's legal practice. As for Shinkoda (*Falling Skies'* Dai), he'll play a newly created character called Hachiro who will appear prominently. Starring Charlie Cox, Rosario Dawson, Vincent D'Onofrio and Elden Henson, Daredevil will arrive on Netflix for your binge-viewing pleasure early next year, by which time these monthly Marvel round-ups will have no doubt grown so large they'll need half the mag! *Ap*

## OVERLOOK HOTEL

As any regular reader knows, Warner Bros' almost sacrilegious plans to prequelise Stephen King's *The Shining* is no secret, but details have so far been sparse. This month brings little movement, but a name did emerge regarding a potential director: Mark Romanek, he of One Hour Photo and clone drama Never Let Me Go. If Romanek lands the job, he'll work from a script by former showrunner of The Walking Dead, Glen Mazzara.

The central story behind Overlook Hotel is based on an unpublished prologue to the classic novel, which was cut before publication. The prequel movie, which will be set at the turn of the 20th century, follows Bob T. Watson, the hotel's first owner, and is expected to open its doors sometime in 2016. *cc*

## GRASSHOPPER JUNGLE

One of the few individuals to ever challenge Marvel Studios' narrative politics, the mighty Edgar Wright has put Ant-Man behind him and is currently eyeing a deal with Sony Pictures to adapt Andrew Smith's acclaimed YA novel Grasshopper Jungle. The book tells the tale of an Iowa-based teenager coming to grips with his hormones and deep feelings of lust, all the while accidentally creating a unique plague with his friends. This releases a legion of huge grasshoppers, who in turn live out lives that the lad

could only dream about, through battling, munching and shagging their way across our unprepared civilisation! But before Grasshopper will likely come Baby Driver, an original action comedy currently shrouded in secrecy that will see him re-unite with producer Nira Park (*The Cornetto Trilogy*) and Working Title Films. Should he leap aboard Grasshopper after that, Sony would obtain Wright's kinetic directing abilities that have seen him rise as a truly unique and formidable filmmaking talent. Fuck it Edgar, grasshoppers are cooler than ants anyway. *on*

## AND FINALLY...

After the turgid Texas Chainsaw 3D, you'd be forgiven for thinking ol' Leatherface had skinned his last hitchhiker. Sadly, it looks like we were wrong, with Lionsgate reportedly keen to explore the horror icon's 'teen years' in yet another entry. ZZZZZZZZ! (Sorry Lionsgate, that's not the sound of a chainsaw, it's the sound of STARBURST readers collectively falling asleep.)

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*Game of Thrones'* Maisie Williams is currently frontrunner to play Ellen Page in the Sam Raimi-produced adaptation of popular videogame, *The Last of Us*.

+++

Worried the newly announced Power Rangers movie would wipe out years of carefully conceived canon? No, neither were we. Nevertheless, executive producer Roberto Orci has taken it upon himself to put paid to the non-concerns by confirming the 2016's big-screen offering will tie into the original TV show. Phew.

+++

Talking of franchises nobody over the age of 12 really gives a monkeys about anymore, The Amazing Spider-Man 3 has been bumped to 2018 so that Sony can concentrate on their various Spidey spin-offs such as The Sinister Six and a rumoured solo outing for either Spider-Woman or Black Cat. The drastic move definitely has nothing to do with the appropriately underwhelming box-office of last April's sequel. No sir.

+++

Freaks and Geeks mastermind Paul Feig is the latest name to be connected with a third Ghostbusters movie, a project that we long got sick of writing about, and you long got sick of reading about. Would it help if we told you Feig is believed to have pitched an all-female reboot of the 1984 classic in lieu of the long-gestating sequel? No? Moving along then...

+++

Tim Allen has revealed that the script for Galaxy Quest 2 exists. By Grabhar's hammer, why are we not watching this right now, Hollywood?

+++

Hot off of the US success of Lucy (reviewed on page 67; spoiler alert, it's rubbish), Luc Besson has decided to focus his energies on a second reboot of his Transporter franchise (there's a TV version knocking around somewhere, god knows what happened to it). Guess the mythology surrounding a bloke who can drive like, really, really fast and fight shirtless while slathered in motor oil (as he's often called to) was so rich, it just had to be told multiple times. The Transporter Legacy, starring Ed Skrein as Frank Martin 3.0, launches a brand new trilogy in 2015.

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In 1942, Enid Blyton, beloved novelist and noted racist, first introduced the world to The Famous Five, a bunch of snooty little shirts who solved crimes and had their own goddamn island. In 2016, Working Title Films will introduce those same snooty little shirts to an audience incapable of envisioning or caring about a world without Facebook, never mind one where children's primary interest was guzzling ginger beer and pleasing Fanny. (As in Aunt Fanny, gutterbrain. Sheesh.)

TTC 404 stories by KRIS HEYS, ANDREW POLLARD, DANIEL SEDDON, DOMINIC CUTHERBERT, MARTIN UNSWORTH and ANDREW MARSHALL. Edited by KRIS HEYS.

12  
Last time they gave us Elijah Wood as a cannibal, a bright yellow serial killer and Mickey Rourke murdering a hell of a lot of people. This time round there's unfortunate gamblers, Jessica Alba going psycho and one of the greatest, deadliest femme fatales cinema has seen in many a year. Oh, and lots more Mickey Rourke ultraviolence. Robert Rodriguez and Frank Miller invite you to take another trip to SIN CITY...

[ Film Noir: (French: "dark film") Style of filmmaking characterised by elements such as cynical heroes, stark lighting effects, frequent use of flashbacks, intricate plots, and an underlying existentialist philosophy - Encyclopaedia Britannica ]

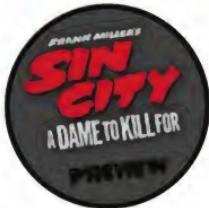
# FATALE ATTRACTION

by Iain Robertson





"This innovative filming technique also helped attract the kind of A-list talent whose salaries wouldn't normally be covered by the film's paltry \$40 million budget."



**S**our typical film noir has hardboiled heroes, gorgeous femme fatales and a rogues gallery of memorable villains. Throw in the likes of Bogart, Bacall and Peter Lorre and you're talking pure cinematic heaven. *Sin City* is not your typical film noir. Yes it has more cynical heroes, stark lighting and existentialist philosophy than you can shake a severed head at. But then it throws in cannibals, ninja assassins, paedophiles, machine gun-toting hookers and the occasional dinosaur for good measure. Bogart, it's probably fair to say, would not approve.

Both Frank Miller's series of graphic novels and Robert Rodriguez's glorious 2005 film took the traditional noir staples and turned them on their head. All the usual elements were present and correct, but *Sin City* infused them with a generous shot of comic book hyperrealism and a healthy dose of none-more black humour. In *Sin City*, world-weary cops exist alongside bright yellow serial killers and the good guys dismember their enemies before feeding them to dogs.

As for *Sin City* itself, or to give it its real, but rarely used name, Basin City, you're not likely to find too many rave reviews on Trip Advisor. It's a crime-ridden hellhole presided over by the powerful Roark family, whose ranks include corrupt senators, cannibalistic Cardinals and paedophile serial killers. Various crime syndicates are constantly at each other's throats. Cops are little help, with the majority working for one of the many criminal factions that control the city. As for the few honest citizens, well, they don't tend to last too long. Basin City is what Gotham would be like if it really let itself go.

Since the first story, *The Hard Goodbye*, was serialised by Dark Horse Comics in 1991, Miller has returned to Basin City for a further five graphic novels, as well as several short stories. Typically for the author, the series has been dogged by controversy, in particular not entirely unfounded accusations of misogyny and homophobia, neither of which stopped it developing a devoted following.

A film adaptation was inevitable, and it took Rodriguez, a long-time fan of the books, to persuade a reluctant Miller to

allow his work to be turned into a film. Miller had been burned by Hollywood before, most notably with his negative experience on the two *RoboCop* sequels. Rodriguez was different though, promising a faithful adaptation, and even offering to let Miller co-direct. In addition, Rodriguez owned his own independent studio, Troublemaker, meaning the film would be free from the big studio interference that plagued some of Miller's earlier ventures into film.

True to his word, the resulting film is one of the most faithful, not to mention best comic book adaptations ever. Shooting almost entirely against green screen, the lack of sets meant the two directors didn't have to compromise in constructing Miller's unique world. This innovative filming technique also helped attract the kind of A-list talent whose salaries wouldn't normally be covered by the film's paltry \$40 million budget. The director even managed to rope in his friend, the notoriously CG-phobic Quentin Tarantino, to direct a scene.

The resulting film was a hit with audiences and critics alike, eventually grossing more than \$150 million. Talk turned, almost immediately, to a sequel. It's been a long time coming. Rodriguez and Miller began developing an adaptation of Miller's second story, *A Dame to Kill For* shortly



after the release of the first movie. *Hell and Back*, the seventh volume, was also considered as a story for the film, with Johnny Depp mooted for the lead role.

It was not to be though. Various problems, not least the untimely deaths of two of the original's stars – Brittany Murphy and Michael Clarke Duncan – have delayed it for best part of a decade. During that time, Miller has made further ventures into film, with adaptations of his 1998 comic book series 300 and its sequel *Rise of an Empire*, based on the yet to be published Xerxes. He's also directed *The Spirit*, to less than stellar reviews. Rodriguez's career has been equally patchy. After 2007's criminally underappreciated *Grindhouse*, he's alternated between children's movies and the likes of *Machete*, as well as overseeing *Predators*, launching his own TV network, and adapting *From Dusk till Dawn* for the small screen.

*Sin City*, though, seems to bring out the best in both directors. The books rank amongst Miller's finest writing, and the film saw Rodriguez reign in some of his more irritating excesses. It also brought out career best performances from many of its cast, most of which have returned for the sequel. Bruce Willis, Jessica Alba, Mickey Rourke, Rosario Dawson, Jamie King and Powers Boothe, amongst others, all reprise their roles. They're joined by new characters, played by the likes of Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Juno Temple, Ray Liotta, Stacey Keach and Hollywood's go-to femme fatale, Eva Green.

There's also been some re-casting. 24's Dennis Haysbert replaces the late Michael Clarke Duncan as Manute. Josh Brolin replaces Clive Owen as Dwight. *Entourage's* Jeremy Piven replaces Michael Madsen, and Jamie Chung replaces the pregnant Devon Aoki as badass ninja assassin Miho.

The original movie adapted three of Miller's existing graphic novels – *The Hard Goodbye*, *The Big Fat Kill* and *That Yellow Bastard* – as well as throwing in short story *The Customer is Always Right* for good measure. *A Dame to Kill For* takes a different approach, mixing two existing stories with two new ones – the first Miller has written for the series in over a decade.

Firstly we have the story which lends the film its name **A DAME TO KILL FOR**. Originally published in 1993, this a follow-up to *The Hard Goodbye*, the story introduces Dwight, played here by Josh



Brolin, as well as the first appearances of Miho, Manute and mob boss Wallenquist (Stacey Keach).

The story sees Brolin's Dwight become entangled in a murderous plot involving the ultimate femme fatale, Ava Lord, played by Eva Green. Running parallel to *The Hard Goodbye*, it's the closest *Sin City* has come to a classic film noir. Besides the titular dame to kill for, the plot features murder, double-crosses aplenty and the kind of hardboiled dialogue Raymond Chandler would be proud of. Although, this being *Sin City*, you can throw in some over-the-top violence from Marv and Miho, as well as copious amounts of sex.

Given that both Dwight and Ava Lord spend a considerable amount of the book au natural, Rodriguez and Miller might have to compromise on their "if it's on the page, we're filming it" philosophy. There's a precedence for this, with Nancy's raunchier scenes first time round were changed at Alba's request, and a scene of Hartigan naked was toned down from the book. However, it's looking like the directors

are keen to push boundaries as far as they possibly can (as this issue's cover might indicate).

Following *300: Rise of an Empire*, *Sin City* is Eva Green's second Miller adaptation this year, and although she seems like perfect casting, she wasn't the original choice for the part. When a sequel was first mooted, Angelina Jolie's name was mentioned frequently, with Rodriguez allegedly even offering to postpone filming whilst Jolie was pregnant. Other names rumoured for the part included Rachel Weisz, as well as the director's frequent muses, Salma Hayek and Rose McGowan.

Lord's character wasn't the only one to undergo casting changes. The part of Dwight was memorably played in the original by Clive Owen, here he's played by Oscar-nominee Brolin. This is no mere re-casting though, as Owen's story – *The Big Fat Kill* – takes place after this one, and Dwight's change of appearance is directly related to the events of *A Dame to Kill For*. Re-watch *The Big Fat Kill* and you'll hear Owen's version of Dwight refer to himself as "a murderer

with a new face who's one fingerprint check away from the fast-track to the gas chamber." *A Dame to Kill For* shows how Dwight ends up in this rather desperate situation.

One character from the book unlikely to be reappearing though is Shellie. The character, played by the late Brittany Murphy first time round and described by Miller as a lynchpin of the series, has a couple of scenes in the book. Unlike Manute though, her character is not central to the story, and so Rodriguez and Miller made the decision to retire, rather than recast the character.

**THE FAT LOSS** is one of two original stories written by Miller for the film. A sequel to the original's *That Yellow Bastard*, it sees Nancy (Jessica Alba) out for revenge following the suicide of John Hartigan (Bruce Willis). As the original story revealed, Nancy had a lifelong love of Hartigan after he saved her from psychopathic child murderer Roark Junior. After he again saved her life years later, killing Roark in the process, Hartigan committed suicide to stop Roark's senator father



"the untimely deaths of two of the original's stars - Brittany Murphy and Michael Clarke Duncan - have delayed it for best part of a decade."





"It's clearly a labour of love for Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who supposedly turned down the role of Star-Lord in *Guardians of the Galaxy* to take the part."

(Powers Boothe) seeking vengeance on Nancy. Now an older, broken Nancy is back, and seeking her own revenge on the senator. This is hardly the sweet innocent Nancy we remember though (sure, she was an exotic dancer, but in Basin City that's about as sweet and innocent as people get). Driven by her desire for revenge, this is a far darker take on the character. Hard-drinking and gun-totting, she's come a long way since the innocent child seen at the opening of the first movie.

Nancy's continued evolution was planned from the start. The character undergoes a complete transformation during the decade-long duration of *That Yellow Bastard*. By the time the first movie was shot, Miller had her journey mapped out for the sequel, even going so far as to plant clues in Nancy's apartment hinting at where she might end up. It's a darker, and larger role than we're used to seeing from Alba recently. Since the birth of her children, she's more often seen nowadays playing supporting roles in family-friendly fare such as Rodriguez's own *Spy Kids* series and *Meet the Parents* sequels. Rodriguez seems to be one of the few directors for whom she's still happy to play adult-oriented roles, with appearances in both *Machete* movies in addition to her return to *Sin City*.

Also returning for the story is Bruce Willis. World-weary cop John Hartigan is one of the truly virtuous characters in *Sin City*, and one of the actor's best performances in years. When the

first movie was released, Miller even went so far as to describe him as "our generation's Humphrey Bogart". It's a smaller role this time round, following his unfortunate suicide at the end of *That Yellow Bastard*, but his death haunts Nancy, and Hartigan is an ever-present presence in her damaged psyche.

The other original story is **THE LONG BAD NIGHT**, starring *Sin City* newcomer Joseph Gordon-Levitt as Johnny. A cocky gambler, like Nancy, Johnny also has personal reasons for wanting to bring down Senator Roark. After he beats Roark in a high stakes poker game, things go very badly for him. The Senator, not surprisingly, doesn't take losing very well and puts Johnny through the ringer. This tale, which may well overlap with *The Fat Loss*, also introduces Marcy (Julia Garner), a young stripper Johnny meets whilst on his mission. The two stories also feature a greatly expanded role for veteran actor Powers Boothe, who previously made a brief appearance in *That Yellow Bastard*. Following the death of his brother, Cardinal Roark (Rutger Hauer) in the previous movie, the senator is the most powerful person in Sin City, and is set to lead the film's glorious rogue's gallery of villains.

It's clearly a labour of love for Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who supposedly turned down the role of Star-Lord in *Guardians of the Galaxy* to take the part. He's quickly becoming a genre veteran, following the likes of the *Dark Knight Rises*, *Inception* and *Looper*, where he

played the younger version of his *Sin City* co-star Bruce Willis.

**JUST ANOTHER SATURDAY NIGHT** features Mickey Rourke's man mountain Marv. Last seen having an unfortunate encounter with an electric chair, this short story, for obvious reasons, takes place before the events of *The Hard Goodbye*. After waking on a highway with no memory of how he got there, Marv begins to recollect what is, to him, a fairly typical night. Remember that moment in *That Yellow Bastard* where Nancy jumps offstage and over an astonished Marv to kiss Hartigan? Just *Another Saturday Night* shows what Marv got up to after his evening's entertainment was cut short. Suffice to say he had a considerably more fun that night than Hartigan and Nancy. Well, Marv's kind of fun, which involves large amounts of violence and a body count. The 1997 short story is just a few pages long, so it could well bookend the movie the way *The Customer is Always Right* did last time round.

Will there be a third movie? Obviously a lot depends upon the success of *A Dame to Kill For*, but there's certainly lots more tales left to tell. Miller's longest *Sin City* story, *Hell and Back*, has long been rumoured for adaptation. The Dwight and Miho-centric *Family Values* also a strong possibility. As for original stories, there's plenty of mileage left in Miller's creation. As a great man once said: "Walk down the right back alley in *Sin City* and you could find anything..."

# FRANK MILLER

[WRITER/CO-DIRECTOR]

*"I haven't seen her in 8 years,  
what did I do to piss her off?"*

#### On the genesis of *Sin City*...

I always wanted to do a crime stories, [but] when I first went into comics they would only really publish stories about guys in tights. So I knew how to draw them. But then, because of my work on Batman and others, I was invited to be a screenwriter, and I was not happy with the process at all. You're like a fire hydrant and there are always dogs coming over and peeing on you or lining up for it. So I moved away and sat down and decided to create the comic book that could not be adapted to the movies – and that was *Sin City*!

#### On stylised dialogue...

I was after a particular tone and a particular feeling. I knew I wanted the archaic way of talking; women would be referred to as 'dames' and such. What I think really emerged in the making of the second movie was that the whole world got used to the world of *Sin City* and accepted it for what it was. And so everyone, from the audience to the cast, came in that much more comfortable with the kind of dialogue that I'd written. I remember coming in on the first day and going over to

Jessica to say hi to her and she would barely say hello to me, she was already in character for a graveyard scene. My first thought was, 'I haven't seen her in 8 years, what did I do to piss her off?'

#### On storyboarding the new segments...

One day I was drawing a storyboard on set and I was drawing a scene with Jessica. And I drew the storyboard the way I normally draw – y'know, it's not exactly realistic. So I drew Jessica in this impossible pose and then I looked up and saw Jessica doing that exact pose! I said, 'how are you doing that?' And she said, 'that's what you drew.' That was the end of the conversation.

#### On co-directing with Robert Rodriguez...

We became a two-headed monster, because we rarely disagreed. But mostly we were both searching for the same goal. And with the things we've both learned over the years we were able to approach that much more efficiently - we hit some notes that I think will really surprise people.





# ROBERT RODRIGUEZ

[CO-DIRECTOR]

"The performances are ten times better - a hundred times better - than the first film because everyone knew what they were doing."

#### **On new *Sin City* tale, *The Long Bad Night*...**

We thought, 'why not give the audience something they can't just go to a comic book, open it up and find out what happens - let's surprise them!' I think that was the most exciting part, being part of Frank's writing process. He would start telling me about this character named Johnny [Joseph Gordon-Levitt] and I would put on my tape recorder and slide it over and listen. And that's how it started. Seeing Frank draw original storyboards on set because we didn't have a graphic novel to [reference] was another great thrill. All these shots had to be created and he would draw them, sometimes ahead of time, sometimes right there on the set. Getting to work with Joseph and Frank to create this character and this story that feels like it would fit right in with all the others - that was exciting!

#### **On the advancements in digital filmmaking...**

The technology changed a lot in the last ten years; digital was barely a thing then. I'd done the very first 3D digital movie [*Spy Kids 3-D: Game Over*] just before *Sin City* using huge cameras. This time we got the latest models fresh from the factory. These things didn't slow us down at all; they were like Ferraris! So we were shooting very, very fast to keep actors in the mood. Another thing that wasn't there ten years ago was smartphones. I got to write the score again and I didn't think I was going to get to. I was really afraid. I had a lot going on this year, I didn't think I'd have the time to sit and make music. But smartphones are a godsend! I'd be asleep in bed and I would turn on the built-in app that has a recorder and I would hum into it, half asleep - I would think of a scene and a piece of music and then I'd hum it! The next day I'd wake up and get to my music station and be like 'what the hell is that?' And I go through it and work it out on the keyboard and that would be

the score. 80% of the score was written on the phone first and then translated. It's really cool how technology can help you catch an idea first and help facilitate things.

#### **On working with Jessica Alba...**

The first person we shot was Jessica, and she came in so prepared and really set the bar for what the performances were gonna be like. I pulled her aside a few times because Mickey Rourke gave her props and I said to her, 'Mickey Rourke never gives props!' He was just saying how amazing she was. There was something going on this time and it stunned us all. I think that's what I was surprised about is how, even though everyone was great in the first film, it was still very early for green screen - people didn't really know what green screen was back then. So people knew what they were doing this time, they'd already seen the film, they already knew what this world was going to be. The performances are ten times better - a hundred times better - than the first film because everyone knew what they were doing.

#### **On complicated scheduling...**

We were starting as we were shooting, so we got this amazing cast just on faith that they would show up and that schedules would work out. Josh [Brolin] was our first choice for Dwight, [but] he wasn't available when we first started shooting. But by the time we got to his section, he was available - with a catch. When he first showed up he said, 'Where's Mickey, aren't all my scenes with Mickey?' And we were like 'oh we shot his scenes like, last month.' He says, 'Well how does that work? He's dragging me around, he carries me around, we drink together?' 'Well, it's the green screen'. 'I've been wanting to work with Mickey for twenty years and I finally get to work with him and he's not here!?' So Josh got to watch scenes with Mickey, then do his bit after that.

**SIN CITY: A DAME TO KILL FOR** opens in UK cinemas August 25th and will be reviewed next issue.

# FRANK TALK

by Andrew Pollard

**STARBURST** pays tribute to the true Godfather of SIN CITY, comic book legend FRANK MILLER...

**F**rank Miller is one of the most iconic, important, and erratic names in the world of comic books. He's created characters of his own, he's done wonders with established icons of the medium, and he's created some truly classic stories. Born in Olney, Maryland on January 27th, 1957, the fifth child of a seven-child Irish Catholic family, it seemed like Miller had comic books on the brain from an early age. Here we look at his rise to stardom.

### A STAR ON THE RISE

Despite being born in Olney, Miller was actually raised in Montpelier, Vermont. Growing up, the young Frank was a big-time comic book fan and even had a letter to Marvel published in April 1973's *The Cat*. It wouldn't be too long before his name would appear in print as more than just a fanboy of the comic book realm, and a move to New York City led to Miller forming an early bond with the legendary Neal Adams. After showing Adams some of his sample work, it wasn't long before he was recommended to Western Publishing, who gave Miller his first published work in their Gold Key Comics imprint. It was just after this time that he also apparently wrote the three-page *Royal Feast* story that appeared in June 1978's *The Twilight Zone* #84, although he was never actually credited with that work. The writing credit for that story was simply listed as an unknown writer, much like July 1978's *Endless Cloud* tale, but many believe that Miller was the man who penned both short stories for the book. Not to worry, for credited work was already on the horizon whilst *Endless Cloud* was still going to print, as Miller was given props for part of Wyatt Gwyon's *Delivery Me From D-Day* six-pageer in June 1978's *Weird War Tales* #64. From there, Miller would set his sights on the big dogs of the yard - Marvel and DC.

The story goes, feeling confident after his Western Publishing work, Miller went straight to DC in search of a job. Not all were sold on this young upstart, but art director Vinnie Colletta thought the kid had potential and so threw some work his way. October 1978's *Weird War Tales* #68 saw Miller doing art on several different short stories, then work on Elliott S. Maggin's *Unknown Soldier* #219 in September of the same year. And that's when his Marvel chance came, as Miller was given pencilling duties on the 17-page (far more than he'd been doing by this stage) *The Master Assassin of Mars*, Part 3, which featured in November 1978's *John Carter, Warlord of Mars* #18.

Miller found a home at Marvel Comics, making a decent living and having regular work, albeit mainly as a fill-in and cover artist. It was with *The Spectacular Spider-Man* #27 in February 1979 that things would change for Frank. That issue and the following issue, which Miller provided the art for, featured appearances by The Guardian Devil himself, Daredevil. Hornhead's book sales were massively suffering at the time, but Miller saw something in the character that inspired him, lit a fuse under him, and got his creative juices going. Never one to be backwards about going forwards, he approached Editor-in-chief Jim Shooter to see if he could join Daredevil's solo title. Long-time artist Gene Colan had recently left Daredevil, so Miller was given the pencilling gig on the book, and this is where his star really began to shine.

### THE MAN WITHOUT FEAR

Daredevil was the first character that Frank Miller really got to play with. Safe to say, the son of Battlin' Jack Murdock was about to get a kick up his red-

suitied arse that would see the character become more popular than he'd ever been at that point, and quite possibly the most relevant he's ever been to this day. Much like Miller, DD was about to become a whole lot more popular.



Dear Marvel,  
Wonderful! At last, a women character with character. I, for one, am sick of the helpless-female types which have cluttered up comics for so long. While I do think they are necessary and nice to look at, they don't have to be the only kind.  
The writing is good; the art, excellent. Keep it up!  
Frank Miller, S.D. #2  
Montpelier, VT, 05602

Up where, Frank?  
No, seriously, we're just delirious from the deluge of great art like you and Shine. We thought it was about time Marvel had a superheroine who stood on her own two feet (paws). A lady who could take care of herself and not be a beautiful. Thus, The Cat! (Not to mention ANNA THE SHE-DEVIL.)  
And Marveldom will never be the same.  
In fact, we're not sure it ever was the same.

Miller's Hornhead run initially began with pencilling May 1979's *Daredevil* #158, although that issue was merely the final part of an already-established story. With his first issue, Miller mixed his own darker, realism-driven, crime-heavy, noir style with the more fundamental and conformist comic book style of the day. But with this one issue, people started to sit up and take note of the now 22-year-old Miller. He had taken a New York that was often so bright and gleaming when heroes like Spider-Man and the Fantastic Four, and dirtied it up, made it gritty, grimy and a far more hostile environment, with Hell's Kitchen itself becoming a key element of *Daredevil*'s world. Still, despite the buzz around Miller's art, *Daredevil* was still an unpopular title doing small numbers. On the brink of being cancelled, Denny O'Neill made a ballsy move that turned the book around. Deciding to fire writer Roger McKenzie, somebody with whom Miller had developed a rocky relationship with, O'Neill, recently made Editor, decided to let Miller have a go at writing *Daredevil*. And with Jan 1981's *Daredevil* #168, Miller was given full writing and penciling duties on the title. Such was the immediate impact of this decision, sales increased to the point where Marvel, after just three issues with Miller as writer, decided to begin running the title as a monthly book rather than the bimonthly title it had previously been.

Not content with just working within the confines of the current Marvel characters, Miller was looking to truly make his own stamp on the comic world by introducing his own new characters. Despite appearing on the cover of *The Comic Journal* #58 in October 1980, it was in *Daredevil* #168 that Miller fully introduced readers to the badass female assassin known simply as Elektra. As it happens, she was meant to be just a one-issue warrior but she would be used frequently until April 1982's *Daredevil* #181, in which she was brutally slain at the hands of Bullseye. In one of the most striking images of the day, not to mention one that stands up even now, Bullseye, a thoroughly nasty bastard of the highest order, runs Elektra through with one of her own sai. After having butted heads with (see: tried to kill) Matt Murdoch/Daredevil for the last year and change, Elektra had a soft-spot for Hornhead. It would be her battle with Bullseye, though, over who would be The Kingpin's top assassin, that led to her demise. Fatally wounded, she managed to crawl to Matt Murdoch's home, where, in classic comic book form, she ended up dying in his arms.

By this stage, Miller had already added a martial arts edge to *Daredevil*; as well as Elektra, he introduced Stick, the leader of ninja clan The Chaste and mentor to the younger Matt Murdoch, and The Hand, who were a villainous, martial-arts heavy

criminal gang that took their focus away from Japan and to an international arena. But as Miller developed and elaborated on the world that *Daredevil* inhabited, he found himself with too much on his plate. With Klaus Janson having been an inker on *Daredevil* since 1975, Miller found himself handing more and more of the art responsibility over to someone else. Reports suggests that Miller's last truly hands-on writing and penciling *Daredevil* gig was with #173, and by *Daredevil* #185 he'd virtually given up the art side of things, just giving rough sketches to Janson to establish, pencil, and ink. Miller, meanwhile, would focus the majority of his attention on the story side of the title as the book became darker and more serious, such as with the aforementioned death of Elektra. In fitting with the world he had now created, Miller then had The Guardian Devil out for revenge and to kill Bullseye, but his time on *Daredevil* was nearly at an end. With February 1983's *Daredevil* #191, an issue he has claimed to be the one he's most proud of, Frank Miller's time on the book was over. From starting work with a failing title that was on the brink of cancellation, Miller had almost single-handedly turned around the fortunes of Matt Murdoch and made him one of the most attractive and best-selling properties in the comic book world of the early 1980s. Job done, Miller was looking at other characters to sink his teeth into.



## THE BIRTH OF THE DARK KNIGHT

Chances are, if somebody has only heard of Frank Miller for just one story, that story would be *The Dark Knight Returns*. But hang on there, eager beavers, for we're not quite at that particular tale just yet. Miller actually got his first taste of Batman back in 1980, providing the art for the Denny O'Neil-penned short *Wanted: Santa Claus - Dead or Alive*, which ran in *DC Special Series #21*, dated Spring 1980. Whilst still over at Marvel, though, the pair of Miller and O'Neil would come together for two issues of *The Amazing Spider-Man Annual* in 1980 and 1981; the first featuring a team-up of ol' Webhead and Doctor Strange, and the second seeing Spidey coming face-to-face with The Punisher. Interestingly, Miller was attached to the Doctor Strange title at one point in early 1981, even penning the cover for April '81's *Doctor Strange #46*. That would fall through, but he still had the chance to work with the Sorcerer Supreme in the Spidey annual. Now if working with Denny O'Neil wasn't cool enough, Miller would then go on to work with another member of comic book royalty, Chris Claremont. Claremont is a legend of the field, particularly when it comes to the X-Men world. Working pencils and co-plotting, Miller teamed with Claremont to produce the impressive *Wolverine* four-issue miniseries, running from September to December in 1982. Bringing his typically dark, brooding, and

often damning approach to the character, Miller's Wolverine work was heralded by many. From here, Frank would move over to DC Comics for a little while.

It was in the early 1980s with DC that Miller would see his first creator-owned title get a run, with the six issue *Ronin* running from 1983 until 1984. The tale of a tortured, masterless warrior, *Ronin* saw Miller bring in an element of manga to his work. Whilst Miller provided the art and writing, Lynn Varley, who would become Miller's wife until a 2005 divorce, provided the colours. And following the success of that series, 1985 saw Frank Miller listed in the 50th anniversary feature, *Fifty Who Made DC Great*. In a case of what could've been, the early '80s saw Miller, along with Steve Gerber, approach DC with a plan to refresh their holy triumvirate of Batman, Superman, and Wonder Woman. The duo's plan was to relaunch the characters under a Metropolis banner, with their individual titles dubbed *Dark Knight*, *Man of Steel*, and *Amazon*, respectively. In more recent years, Heath Ledger stole the show in Christopher Nolan's *The Dark Knight*, the latest Superman movie was titled *The Man of Steel*, whilst Amazon is the title of a Wonder Woman TV series that has been in development hell for years at The CW. Nice to see Miller and Gerber ahead of the time, at least in titles here. Yes, this was possibly a missed opportunity from DC, but Miller was about to create his masterpiece.

As 1986 rolled around, Frank Miller's *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns* was released. A four-part series, the story changed the landscape of comics book and is generally seen as one of, if not the, greatest comic book story of all time. Inked by Klaus Janson and coloured by Lynn Varley, *The Dark Knight Returns* was published in a square-bound way rather than stapled, printed on strong, heavy paper rather than newsprint, and with card covers rather than paper covers. The plot centred on an older Bruce Wayne who had retired the cape and cowl after the death of Jason Todd, aka Robin. The 55-year-old Wayne can take no more of a dark future filled with violence and gang-culture, especially with nobody else seemingly doing anything to make changes. And so Wayne once more becomes the Caped Crusader. Miller's Batman was like no Batman we'd ever seen. Yes, there had been some great Batman stories before *The Dark Knight Returns*, but it was with this tale that Batman was given a darker, clinical edge. In terms of the story's title, that was derived from the *Darknight Detective* moniker that was given to Bats throughout the '70s. Similarly, the release of *The Dark Knight Returns* came about during the same year as Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons' legendary *Watchmen*, another darker, more adult-oriented and serious book that worked on multiple levels. *The Dark Knight Returns* is seen as a seminal work that helped to



revolutionise the world of comic books in the 1980s and beyond.

### BETTER THE DEVIL YOU KNOW

By the time *The Dark Knight Returns* was creating waves, Miller had returned to the familiar setting of Hell's Kitchen. After writing *Daredevil* #219's 'Badlands' story in June 1985, pencilled by John Buscema, Miller co-penned January 1986's *Daredevil* #226 with Dennis O'Neil, who was in the midst of leaving the book. It was with the following issue that Miller made yet another statement of intent with the Daredevil character. Teaming with artist David Mazzucchelli, Miller created a seven-issue arc called *Daredevil: Born Again* that ran from February 1986's #227 until August '86's #233. Here we saw a real use of Catholicism (Wow!) in Miller's work, as he took Matt Murdock to the brink of insanity. Whilst there were no Buddy Christ images, there was a lot of religious imagery sprinkled throughout the *Born Again* arc, including the return of Matt's mother, now a nun. A truly dark story, particularly for a Marvel book, *Born Again* saw Matt's former love, Karen Page, now addicted to heroin and working in porn. Doing anything for a hit, Karen gives away the "Matt Murdock is Daredevil" secret for a quick score. The secret winds up in the hands of The Kingpin, resulting in Murdock's life being ruined, his home destroyed, law licence taken from him and partner Foggy Nelson's life being in danger. In the world

of Daredevil, Miller and Mazzucchelli's *Born Again* is one of the seminal stories for Hornhead. And from there, Miller began work on a two-part DD story with artist Walt Simonson which would never see the light of day. From *Born Again*, Miller brought in artist Bill Sienkiewicz to work on 1986's *Daredevil: Love and War* graphic novel. With The Kingpin as a focal point, this work would essentially tie together Miller's initial *Daredevil* run with his *Born Again* story. By this time, Miller and Sienkiewicz had also started the eight-issue *Elektra: Assassin* miniseries for Epic Comics; a non-canonical tale that looked at Elektra's past.

Switching sides once more, Miller would return to work with the World's Greatest Detective in 1987. This time with Mazzucchelli in tow, Miller created *Batman: Year One*. Another one of the greatest Batman stories ever told, the tale ran from *Batman* #404 - #407 and was Miller's take on the origins of the Caped Crusader with a huge dollop of Jim Gordon origins thrown in for good measure. Similar to *The Dark Knight Returns*, *Year One* is still one of the best-selling Batman stories out there, with both also going on to get adapted into animated features in later years. But Miller's work at DC was about to come to a halt, for now at least. It was at this time that Miller and several others, including Alan Moore and Marv Wolfman,

ended up in a row with DC Comics over a suggested ratings system for their books. Seeing this as censorship, Miller et al took exception, refusing to do any future work with DC. From here, Miller took his own ideas over to Dark Horse Comics.

### WISHFUL SINFUL

Before fully engulfing himself in the independent world of Dark Horse, Miller produced one more story for Marvel Comics' Epic imprint. Teaming up again with Lynn Varley, Miller produced the *Elektra Lives Again* graphic novel, detailing the resurrection of the master assassin and Daredevil's mission to track her down. Once the rebirth of Elektra was done, Miller focussed on Dark Horse and worked with artist Geoff Darrow on the three-issue *Hard Boiled* in 1990, and then did *Give Me Liberty* with Dave Gibbons, which was later followed by sequels and specials. Next in Miller's crosshairs was the man formerly known as Murphy, RoboCop, as he was brought in to pen the scripts for both *RoboCop 2* and *RoboCop 3*. Whilst Miller's story for 1990's *RoboCop 2* was apparently brilliant, it was also pretty much impossible to film, meaning that substantial rewrites were done by other parties which resulted in the final movie product bearing only a small resemblance to what Miller had planned. As for *RoboCop 3*, Miller turned in a story during late 1990/early 1991 for the planned 1992 release of the movie. Whilst the majority



of his script stayed in the film, including the Otomo nod to *Ronin* and the Bertha Washington nod to *Give Me Liberty*, the film had various problems, culminating in a delayed release in 1993. Despite Miller's problems with the cinematic *RoboCop*, his plans would be brought to life in comic book form years later. Steve Grant, another big name in comics, took plot elements from Miller's *RoboCop 2* and *RoboCop 3* scripts and released them through Avatar Press' Pulsar imprint in 2003 under the title *Frank Miller's RoboCop*.

Away from Miller's *RoboCop* fiasco, 1991 saw the writer/artist/erratic genius begin work on his very first *Sin City* story. Starting as serialized work in *Dark Horse Presents #51*, Miller decided to develop *Sin City* as a black and white world in order to put the focus on its darker, film noir roots. This initial run, from *Dark Horse Presents #51 - #62* would eventually be released as a trade paperback in 1995 dubbed *The Hard Goodbye*. But that was not enough for Miller, as the world of *Sin City* dragged him in like a seductive whore, with him revisiting that dirty habit on a regular basis for the rest of the '90s. Still, despite 1991 seeing the start of Miller's descent into the grimy corners of *Sin City*, the decade still saw him doing work elsewhere, such as 1993's *Daredevil: The Man Without Fear* with John Romita Jr., a tale that reinvented The Guardian Devil's origins, and assisting Todd McFarlane on *Spawn* and *Image*

Comics' *Spawn/Batman* crossover. With the likes of Romita Jr. and McFarlane, it's easy to talk about the names that Miller was now working with or had worked with, such as Neal Adams, Denny O'Neil, Chris Claremont, Dave Gibbons, and Dave Mazzucchelli, but Frank was at the stage now where he was the star attraction on whatever he did. Even the stuff he did that wasn't massively heralded was still being celebrated in certain quarters, such as 1995's *Big Guy and Rusty the Boy Robot* later being turned into an animated series in 1999.

Much like Miller's *Sin City* fables had thrown a filth-covered curveball at the comic book medium, 1998 saw him team up once more with Lynn Varley to create *300*. This miniseries viewed the classic Battle of Thermopylae through the eyes of Leonidas of Sparta, complete with bulging, rippling dialogue and brutal, clinical bloodshed, inspired by 1962's *The 300 Spartans* movie. Of course, this would end up being adapted as a 2007 movie by Zack Snyder, with a sequel following down the line. But if you want Frank Miller to do gritty dialogue and brutal violence, where better to place this creative force of nature than at the door of Wayne Manor.

### LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE?

By the time that the heinous acts of September 11th, 2001 occurred, Frank

Miller had relocated to Hell's Kitchen, just four miles from the terrorist attacks of that day. At the time, he was already underway with work on a sequel to arguably the greatest comic book tale of all time, *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. Miller would visit the topic of terrorism at a later date, but for now he was focussing his attention on a follow-up dubbed *Batman: The Dark Knight Strikes Again*. Yes, that means he had managed to resolve those earlier differences with DC Comics, returning to work with one of their key characters and somebody that he worked wonders with in 1986. The sales figures for the story, initially produced as a three-issue miniseries, were impressive but the critical and fan reaction wasn't quite so good. With the near-impossible task of living up to *The Dark Knight Returns*, the sequel was always going to struggle in being taken as its own story. The basic premise sees Batman, then presumed dead for 3 years, return to lead an uprising against a Lex Luthor dictatorship. A mysterious figure, highly resembling The Joker, appears and kills the likes of Martian Manhunter, Guardian, and Creeper, whilst the story also features Superman, Wonder Woman, Green Arrow, Green Lantern, The Flash, Captain Marvel, The Atom, Plastic Man, and Brainiac. It's revealed that the presumed Joker is actually Dick Grayson, former Robin, in a twist that just felt so underwhelming.



Yes, this is officially a non-canon story, but the logic is a little out there, plus casual fans expected something bigger. To long-time Batman fans, the idea of Dick, despite their various differences over the years, becoming a full-on insane villain was hard to swallow.

For those who had problems with *The Dark Knight Strikes Again*, 2005 would throw up further issues. Now comic book names don't get much bigger than Frank Miller, but Jim Lee is right up there with him. So you take Frank Miller, in his day arguably one of the best minds in the industry, and you team him with Jim Lee, one of the modern greats of comic book artwork, throw in the legendary Caped Crusader and surely you have a fail-safe, idiot-proof recipe for success, right? Apparently not. The duo of Miller and Lee teamed together for *All Star Batman & Robin*, the *Boy Wonder*, which was set in the world established by Miller in his *Dark Knight* stories of yesteryear. The story begins with the death of Dick's parents whilst performing as The Flying Graysons... then Batman steals the grieving Dick, slaps him around, calls him a "little snot" and takes him to the Batcave where he's told to eat vermin. Bats then proceeds to manhandle Alfred and piss off Superman and Wonder Woman. It's all a little uncomfortable. Throw in massive delays (the title only did 10 issues in 3 years!) and this proved

to be one dream team-ups that just didn't seem to work. Lee admitted that he got massively behind schedule due to other commitments, whilst Miller's "goddamn" Batman was one of the biggest dickheads, wonderful toys or not, that has been seen in comic books. Yes, he was supposed to be the *Dark Knight* Batman, but it just never felt quite right.

Luckily for Miller, a lot of the issues with *All Star Batman & Robin* were swept under the carpet in the aftermath of the success of 2005's *Sin City* movie. Directed by both Miller and Robert Rodriguez, *Sin City* dropped jaws, grabbed attention, encouraged dirty chuckles, and made people cover their eyes. In terms of taking a book and bringing it to life on the big screen, *Sin City* is right up there with the best of them, so much so that a particular sequel, which you may or may not have seen referenced a few times in this issue, was given the go signal. That said, after the original *Sin City* movie, Miller went on to direct 2008's *The Spirit*, based on Will Eisner's graphic novel. Unfortunately for Miller, this was panned by critics and fans alike, despite its visual style and appeal.

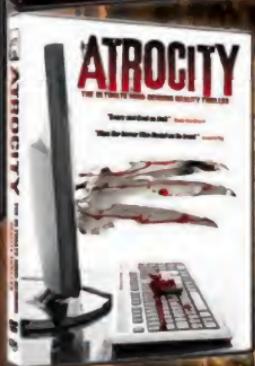
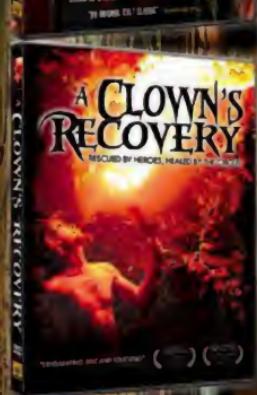
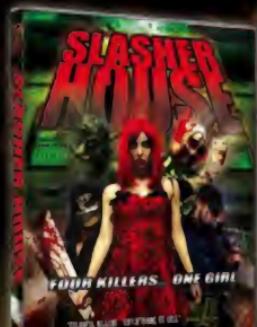
Whilst Miller was trying his luck on the big screen, 2006 saw him start work on a project known as *Holy Terror, Batman!* Whilst seeing Spider-Man helping to assist in the rescue efforts of 9/11

brought a lump to the throat, Miller's plan for Batman was for the Dark Knight to be shown punching terrorists as they attempt to take over Gotham City. This title didn't see the light of day for various reasons, although Miller cited that it no longer felt like a Batman story as the main reason. Come September 28th, 2011, Legendary Comics released Miller's new take on the tale, simply dubbed *Holy Terror*. Taking the Caped Crusader out of the equation, Miller focussed on a superhero called The Fixer as he fights against Muslim terrorists attacking Empire City. Whilst the final product wasn't all that great, Miller himself said that the book was, "bound to offend just about everybody."

So there we have it: enough Frank Miller information for you to win a Frank Miller-themed Pub Quiz with. At times he may be a little erratic, eccentric and too out there for some, but there's no doubt that Miller is one of the all-time greatest talents that the comic book world has ever seen come crashing through its doors. Whether it's taking Daredevil from the brink of cancellation to being one of the most must-read characters of the day, turning Batman on his head and throwing him cowl-first into a very-adult world, or creating characters and environments all of his own making, there's no disputing that this man is a one-of-a-kind rare commodity who, on his day, can flip an entire industry on its head.



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# OUTSIDE THE BOX

ALL THE NEWS  
FROM THE WORLDS  
OF DOCTOR WHO  
WITH PAUL MOUNT



## Series Eight Arrives!

In production since January, the eighth series of *Doctor Who* finally arrives on TV in the UK and the USA on 23rd August with showrunner Steven Moffat's *Deep Breath* properly introducing the Twelfth Doctor Peter Capaldi as the TARDIS pitches up on the banks of the Thames in Victorian London where some old friends - and enemies - are waiting for him. Jenna Coleman returns as the Doctor's latest companion Clara and the episode, which runs to around seventy-five minutes, also features a return for the Paternoster Gang, the 19th century investigative trio comprising Silurian Madame Vastra (Neve McIntosh), her partner Jenny Flint (Catrin Stewart) and her tame Sontaran butler Strax (Dan Starkey). The episode, directed by Ben Wheatley, is due to air around 7pm on BBC1 in the UK. Episode 2, *Into the Dalek* also directed by Wheatley, is written by Phil Ford and airs on 30th August and its guest stars include Michael Smiley and Zawe Ashton. Mark Gatiss's *Robots of Sherwood*, directed by Paul Murphy, screens on 6th September and its cast includes Tom Riley and Ben Miller. Episode four remains untitled but is written by Steven Moffat and directed by Douglas Mackinnon and is rumoured to be a low-key character piece which sees the Doctor kicking his heels with nothing much to do whilst Clara goes out on a date with her new boyfriend Danny Pink (Samuel Anderson). Episode titles and transmission dates are, of course, subject to change.

Season eight has now finished filming and stars Capaldi and Coleman have just concluded a whirlwind promotional 'world tour' which has seen them premiering the first episode and meeting fans at Cardiff and London (8th August) and calling in at Seoul in South Korea, Sydney in Australia, New York in the USA, Mexico City in... er... Mexico and finally concluding at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil on 19th August.

Following the success of the cinema screenings of last year's anniversary episode *Day of the Doctor*, *Deep Breath* will also enjoy theatrical screenings on 23rd August at UK cinema chains Cineworld, Vue, Odeon (with London's Odeon screening including special presentations and a live Q&A which will be beamed to Odeon cinemas across the country), Empire, Omniplex and Picture House. Screenings are also planned for the US and across the world. We suspect that tickets have long since sold out.

## DOCTOR WHO DVD

The BBC have announced the release of a special limited edition *Doctor Who 50th Anniversary Boxset* on DVD and Blu-ray on September 8th. The set includes previously released episodes *The Name of the Doctor*, *The Day of the Doctor* and Matt Smith's Christmas finale *The Time of the Doctor* as well as the online mini-episode *Night of the Doctor* which saw Eighth Doctor Paul McGann briefly reprise the role. The set will also include Mark Gatiss's acclaimed 'origins of Doctor Who' drama *An Adventure in Space and Time* (making its Blu-ray debut in the UK), the popular *Five(ish)* *Doctor Reboot* written and directed by Peter Davison, as well as behind-the-scenes features, *The Day of the Doctor* cast read-through footage, BBC3's *Ultimate Guide* documentary, BBC2's *Science of Doctor Who*, 2 BBC America documentaries and the 2013 *Doctor Who Prom* as well as deleted scenes and trailer material.

## DOCTOR WHO's First Producer Commemorated

A plaque celebrating the life and work of *Doctor Who*'s iconic and trail-blazing first producer, Verity Lambert, who died in 2007, has been unveiled at the famous Riverside Studios in London where many of the early black-and-white *Doctor Who* episodes were recorded. The plaque, sponsored by the *Doctor Who* Appreciation Society, was unveiled in July at a ceremony attended by William Russell and Carole Ann Ford, the only two surviving members of the show's original cast, and Waris Hussein, who directed the very first serial back in 1964. Verity's credits beyond *Doctor Who* included classic British TV productions such as *The Naked Civil Servant*, *Jonathan Creek*, *Adam Adamant Lives!*, *Rumpole of the Bailey* and *Minder*. The plaque will remain *in situ* at Riverside until the complex closes for redevelopment in the Autumn after which time it will be displayed at the new Riverside media complex due to open next year.



## DOCTOR WHO Springs a Leak

Alarms bells and panic attacks were the order of the day across the BBC when the scripts for the first five episodes of the new season and, more alarmingly, unfinished edits of the first few episodes, were leaked onto the internet-thing at the beginning of July. The material is believed to have leaked from the BBC's Latin America headquarters in Miami where it had been sent for translation and subtitling prior to transmission. The BBC quickly stepped in to retrieve and remove the material, apologising to the show's production team and imploring fans not to be tempted to access the scripts and the footage. "We deeply regret this and apologise to all the show's fans, the BBC and the cast and crew who have worked tirelessly making the series... We would like to make a plea to anyone who might have any of this material and spoilers associated with it not to share it with a wider audience so that everyone can enjoy the show as it should be seen when it launches." A few days later the BBC seemed pleased that, despite some fans being unable to resist the lure of illicit new Who, the show's secrets appeared to have been largely kept under wraps. "We would like to thank Doctor Who fans everywhere for their amazing efforts in helping us contain the recent leaks," said an official BBC statement. "The mistake was damaging and resulted in the exposure of five scripts and the first six unfinished episodes from Series 8 on a publicly-accessible FTP site. While there is still a risk that this leak will result in more of this content emerging, so far the impact has been contained to a limited amount of this material through a combination of fans' efforts and the plan that we put in place using new technology and internal manpower to limit any illegal activity. We would particularly like to thank the fan-site moderators and Doctor Who devotees who have actively protected the programme." Showrunner Steven Moffat appeared to be fairly sanguine about the incident after the event. "It was kind of depressing and I was very miserable for a weekend but for the sake of, I suppose, a lot of thousands of people who've read it or seen it, I kind of think the ones who have will show up and watch the real show anyway and the other 100% of the audience won't even know it was leaked," he said at the London premiere for *Guardians of the Galaxy* last month.



Series 8, Episode 1

"DEEP BREATH"  
STEVEN MOFFAT



## DOCTOR WHO Goes Symphonic

The *Doctor Who Symphonic Spectacular*, a musical celebration of the work of composer Murray Gold, conducted by long-time series contributor Ben Foster, has been a huge sell-out success during its world premiere performances in Australia. The show is now making its way to the UK with venues booked and tickets available for performances across the UK next Spring. The show, featuring 100 performers and with the music itself performed by the BBC National Orchestra of Wales and the BBC National Chorus of Wales will include on-stage appearances by the Doctor's most formidable and persistent adversaries including the Daleks, the Cybermen, The Silence, the Ice Warriors and the Weeping Angels. The tour will call at London, Cardiff, Birmingham, Leeds, Newcastle and Glasgow between May 23rd and May 29th 2015. More information and details on how to book tickets - if the dates aren't already sold-out - can be found at [www.doctorwhosymphonicspectacular.com](http://www.doctorwhosymphonicspectacular.com).

## Book News Update

Following the news in issues 402 and 403 of the forthcoming publication of three new BBC *Doctor Who* novels to coincide with the start of season eight on TV, cover images have been released for the new titles - *The Crawling Terror* by Mike Tucker, *Silhouette* by Justin Richards and *The Blood Cell* by James Goss. The hardback books are released early on 11th September.

25th September sees the arrival of the *Doctor Who Annual 2015*, the 64-page Christmas book aimed at younger viewers. The first annual to feature new Doctor Peter Capaldi, fans can expect the usual collection of comic strips, lightweight features, pin-ups and puzzles.



# WATCHING DOCTOR WHO

AN IN-DEPTH LOOK  
AT THE WHONIVERSE  
BY JR SOUTHALL



Every now and again a *Doctor Who* story comes along that takes everything that has preceded it and reimagines the series' boundaries for the future. There are any number of these in the first few years of the show, beginning with *The Dalek Invasion of Earth* and including *The Time Meddler* and *The War Machines*; stories that expand upon rather than supersede what has taken place before, and by doing so open up new avenues for the show to subsequently explore. But as the show grows older and inhabits its format more fully, grows into itself that is, these pioneering stories become thinner on the ground. After the first regeneration in *The Tenth Planet*, there isn't another paradigm-shift as great until *The War Games* introduces the Time Lords three years later – and thereafter the series is established firmly enough that any changes wrought upon it will generally be considerably less seismic.

Which isn't to say that this doesn't still happen. *Doctor Who* would have grown

stale and been cancelled a long time ago (or rather, a long time before it was) if it didn't include a huge capacity for change – and as each new writing regime makes their mark upon the show, so it reflects their different personalities and tells different stories as a consequence.

But there are also still the occasional one-off stories that come along and make something entirely new of what went before – either within the fiction or from a production point of view – and that once broadcast cast a shadow over much of what ensues.

One such story is *The Three Doctors*, which establishes a simple premise that bends but doesn't break the rules that govern the series, while simultaneously altering our perception of what *Doctor Who* is capable of and laying a foundation for many of the stories that follow.

The first time *Doctor Who* had addressed time travel as a plot point, rather than as a device by which to travel between

stories, was in *The Space Museum* back in 1965. The author of that story, Glyn Jones, had fudged the issue rather, devising an interesting premise but with no idea of where to take it. It was another seven years before the theme was raised again, this time in *Day of the Daleks*.

Producer Barry Letts had taken over the show two years earlier, and was keen to begin each series with a crowd-pulling curtain-raiser, something that would draw attention to the show. His first attempt was the introduction of the Master allied with a return visit from the Autons, and in 1972 he encouraged Louis Marks to add the Daleks to his time paradox story *The Ghost Hunters* in order to maximise publicity for the start of *Doctor Who's* ninth series. Having begun each of his previous runs with either of the Doctor's arch-nemeses, then, when it came time to planning the tenth series, Letts must have wondered where else he had left to go.

I don't suppose we'll ever know quite whose idea it was or quite how and why the

idea became a reality, but *Day of the Daleks* was probably a significant influence, far more so than The Space Museum. Because Louis Marks' story had begun (and was due to end, but for production difficulties) with a scene in which the Doctor was seen to accidentally cross his own timeline. So when casting around for ideas for a grand opening for the tenth anniversary season, Letts and his script editor Terrance Dicks would have been looking for something even "bigger" than the Daleks as a draw – and what better than to have the Doctor crossing not just his own timeline, but the timelines of his previous selves?

And so *The Three Doctors* was born, a story in which the Time Lords bring together the third Doctor with each of his previous incarnations in order to defeat the ultimate menace, the Time Lord – gone rogue – who had developed the concept of time travel, and thus the premise for the entire series, in the first place.

Although *The Three Doctors*, like many other stories, was written as a one-off, without a thought for how it might affect the future of Doctor Who, there's little doubt that some of the ideas included therein have become immensely significant in the development of the series. The most obvious example of this is in the way the series has developed subsequent anniversaries – with the one notable exception proving just how much of a shadow *The Three Doctors* has cast.

When the twentieth anniversary of Doctor Who arrived in 1983, producer John Nathan Turner had no desire that the anniversary story should be anything other than a multi-Doctor one – even Robert Holmes' unused original version (replaced by the Terrance Dicks script that subsequently made it to screen) would have featured as many Doctors as were willing and able to appear (one more than Dicks', in fact!). That JNT was only able to cobble together three actual Doctors, a surrogate and a previously unused sequence didn't clip *The Five Doctors'* wings. The special is genuinely one of the most fondly remembered episodes ever broadcast, so much so that ten years later the thirtieth anniversary was celebrated in ostensibly the same way even though



the series had been put to rest four years earlier. In 2003, Zagreus was Big Finish's fortieth anniversary audio drama and, it goes without saying, included just as many Doctors as either of those previous anniversary specials. So when it came time for Steven Moffat to write the script for the fiftieth anniversary story, the question wasn't of whether multiple Doctors would be involved, but only how many and which ones.

That the twenty-fifth anniversary story, *Silver Nemesis*, neglected to include any previous occupants of the TARDIS at all might be due both to the series' finances and its reputation in the late 1980s, but despite any number of other problems with the story, it would undoubtedly have been much more highly thought of if it had.

The other important legacy of *The Three Doctors* has been in its influence on the series' mythology. The Time Lords might have made their first appearance in 1969's *The War Games*, but the society envisioned there was a monolithic one, with little scope for further drama beyond the trial the second Doctor underwent. By introducing a back-story for the Doctor's people in *The Three Doctors*, Letts and Dicks opened a Pandora's

Box of possibilities that subsequent production teams went on to explore almost constantly across the next fifteen years, notably in *The Deadly Assassin* and *The Trial of a Time Lord*, but not least of all in *Arc of Infinity*, a direct sequel to the tenth anniversary story. And it's not without note that when Russell T Davies brought the series back in 2005, one of the main ingredients was a Doctor damaged and alone because of an almost mythically vast Time War and the extinction of his species.

Prior to *The Three Doctors* – and perhaps also *The War Games* – the series Doctor Who had prospered in its lack of focus, making a virtue of the limitless and infinitely variable constitution the series' creators had devised. While Barry Letts was already busy imposing structure on that format, the devising of a domestic history for the programme's hitherto largely unknowable eponymous hero provided the backbone from which the future of the fiction might form. Perhaps the ultimate conglomeration of all these elements was in *The Five Doctors*, wherein each of the themes introduced or consolidated in *The Three Doctors* is taken to a logical conclusion.

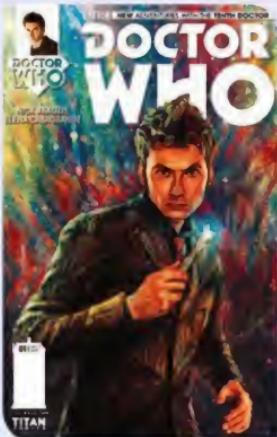
The most appropriate celebration that *Day of the Doctor* included therefore, wasn't that it featured various Doctors meeting themselves, but that it centred around a mistake from the Time Lords' past that needed rectifying, evoking memories of both the tenth and twentieth anniversary stories – and the gloriously celebratory visual of all twelve incarnations lined up at the end was just the icing on the cake, the *Radio Times* cover from forty years earlier updated and canonsised on-screen.

Over the next couple of issues, while I take a short break from writing *Watching Doctor Who*, two guest columnists will be writing about other stories – both from Russell T Davies' first year as showrunner – and examining how they each managed to change the rules by which we understand Doctor Who.



# REVIEWS

NEW WHO RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



**DOCTOR WHO: THE TENTH DOCTOR #1**  
AUTHOR: NICK ABADZIS / ARTIST: ELENA CASAGRANDE, ARIANNA FLORIAN / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW



**DOCTOR WHO: THE ELEVENTH DOCTOR #1**  
AUTHOR: AL EWING, ROB WILLIAMS / ARTIST: ALICE X. ZHANG, SIMON FRASER / PUBLISHER: TITAN / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

If each story in Titan's new Doctor Who comic range is equivalent to a TV episode, this first one is the 20 minutes that probably should have been left on the cutting room floor.

Consider how introducing a new companion was done in Rose. We see her waking up; going to work; meeting her boyfriend, and all of this is completed within a quick montage. The backstory comes out gradually over the course of subsequent episodes but we have basically all we need to know by the end of the first episode. This first issue of the new Tenth Doctor storyline, on the other hand, is all setup. We meet his new companion, Gabriella Gonzalez and get to know her and her extensive family in excruciating detail. So much so in fact, that it is difficult to care too much about them as you just want to see the Doctor (who in any case, doesn't appear much in this issue).

At least he's drawn quite well when you do see him though, which is more than we can say about 11's character model (more on that in our review of that comic). This is true of the artwork in general, which is pretty consistently nice (apart from one or two moments that are giggle-inducing when they're presumably supposed to be serious).

The mini-comic at the end of the issue

isn't as good as the one in the Eleventh Doctor's comic though, especially when you consider that the other comic has two as opposed to this one. This has only a single comic which serves as little more than an advertisement for the little vinyl figures Titan are doing. This is a bit shameless but harmless enough, and at least it's an inventive way to do it.

The problem with this comic; is that when reading it, one gets the feeling that it could have been cut down by half its length and it wouldn't have lost much. When that's the state of affairs, something's gone wrong.

SCOTT VARNHAM

+++++ 4



One of Steven Moffat's core strengths as a Doctor Who writer (apparently we are not small children, therefore we're unable to verify this) is that he can frighten the hell out of small children. Should he find himself out of a job when your children need to be frightened, you could show them Titan Comics' idea of what Matt Smith's face looks like instead. We're not saying it's bad artwork (on the contrary, some of the images in here are very well drawn), we're merely saying that judging by the interior art, they couldn't obtain the rights to Smith's likeness. To be fair, the Tenth Doctor's likeness in his own line of comics isn't too great either!

One positive thing that has carried across both ranges is the quality of the writing (so far; as we've only read the first issue of either it's early days yet). While you may have already read our criticisms of the Tenth Doctor's storyline, the actual dialogue for both ranges feels very smart and well written; some of the lines here actually feel like they've been cribbed from Eleventh Doctor TV scripts. The story moves a lot quicker here, as we're given a brief introduction that gives us the essence of

what new companion Alice Obiefune is like before we bound headfirst into adventure. We're a lot more excited to see how this tale finishes than the Tenth Doctor's.

If you can get past the patchy quality of the art (which was almost a deal-breaker for us), you'll probably enjoy this comic. But it's easy to see why you might find it difficult to take seriously and it's only the writing that goes any way towards redeeming it.

SCOTT VARNHAM

+++++ 5



# The WORLDCON comes to LONDON August 2014

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BY ANDREW POLLARD

IT SEEMS LIKE IT WAS ONLY YESTERDAY THAT WE WERE TAKING A LOOK AHEAD AT THE UPCOMING SECOND SEASON OF THE CW'S ARROW (IT WAS ACTUALLY WAY BACK IN ISSUE #393). THAT SEASON IS NOW OFFICIALLY IN THE BOOKS AND WAS AN ABSOLUTELY FANTASTIC 23-EPIISODE RUN OF TV, MEANING ONLY THING: IT'S BACK TO STARLING CITY...

## JARROW SEASON 3 PREVIEW



To begin, it would be massively remiss of us to not talk at least a little about the aforementioned second season of the show. Whilst season 1 was good, season 2 was often stunning. In fact, you could certainly make a case for season 2 of Arrow being the best thing on TV over the last 12 months.

### RECAPPED AND RESTRUNG

Season 2 of Arrow began with Starling City picking up the pieces after Malcolm Merlyn's (John Barrowman) 'Undertaking' plot. As the city attempted to rebuild itself, the season saw a race for mayor headed up by newcomer Kevin Alejandro's Sebastian Blood. Opposing him would be Susanna Thompson's Moira Queen, once she had dabbled with a bit of prison time for her part in the Undertaking, of course. Sebastian 'Brother' Blood wasn't the only newcomer to the show, oh no. In terms of familiar DC characters, season 2 of the show introduced fans to versions of villains Bronze Tiger (Michael Jai White), Shrapnel (Sean Maher), Amanda Waller (Cynthia Addai-Robinson), Professor Ivo (Dylan Neal), Clock King (Robert Knepper), Isabel Rochev (Summer Glau), KGBeast (David Nyki), Solomon Grundy (Graham Shiel), Dollmaker (Michael Eklund), Nyssa al Ghul (Katrina Law), the rise to Deathstroke of Slade Wilson (Manu Bennett), and even

the briefest blink and you'll miss it appearance of Harley Quinn (Cassidy Alexandra, voiced by Tara Strong), although not all of these were necessarily firmly on the side of evil just yet. On the other side of the fence, the show's version of Black Canary (Caity Lotz), dubbed simply Canary, made her bow, as did Sin (Bex Taylor-Klaus) and a certain bumbling Central City geeky forensic assistant by the name of Barry Allen (Grant Gustin). Then there was the return of several Season 1 characters, such as Shado (Celine Jade), China White (Kelly Hu), Malcolm Merlyn, Deadshot (Michael Rowe), Huntress (Jessica De Gouw), Agent Lyla Michaels (Audrey Marie Anderson), the fantastically over-the-top Count (Seth Gabel), and the usual family and friends of Stephen Amell's Oliver Queen. Quite the impressive roster of characters, we're sure you'll agree. Even more impressive, the show managed to survive the infamous curse of Summer Glau (Google it!).

In terms of plot, central to season 2 was the dynamic between Oliver and Slade Wilson. Initially the island flashbacks showed them as brothers-in-arms, but Wilson's arrival in modern-day Starling City suggested that the kinship had certainly soured. Blaming Oliver for the death of Shado back on the island, present-day Slade set out to make the Emerald Archer's life a misery. Toying with the young Queen, and always being at



least two steps ahead. Slade wanted to bring a whole world of pain and suffering to his former friend. Injected with the Mirakuru substance – a serum discovered during the island flashback days that makes the user unstable, to say the least, but that gives super-strength, agility and near-invincibility – Slade unleashes an army of mini-Deathstrokes on Starling City, and attacks Oliver where it hurts most by mercilessly killing mother Moira in front of a helpless Ollie and sister Thea (Willa Holland). As well as his Mirakuru-riddled army, Wilson also worked alongside Brother Blood, who in turn had Cyrus Gold (known as Solomon Grundy to comic book fans) working for him, and Isabel Rochev, who ended up having a hand in ousting Oliver from Queen Consolidated. Helping Oliver through all of this was Diggle (David Ramsey), Felicity (Emily Bett Rickards), Roy Harper (Colton Haynes), Quentin Lance (Paul Blackthorne), Laurel Lance (Katie Cassidy), and Canary, who is revealed to be the presumed-dead Sara Lance. As the season came to a close, we saw Oliver take down Slade both on the island and in the present-day, with us learning how the patch-wearing Wilson came to lose the use of one of his eyes. Some survived with The Arrow, other faces didn't make it. What we got, though, was a brilliantly-paced, engaging, dynamic, and enthralling season of television. Safe to say, the pressure is firmly on for season 3 to be a barnstormer.

## FROM VIGILANTE TO HERO

Whilst familiar faces returned, new faces surfaced, and other faces perished, our hero of the hour underwent a noticeable transformation throughout season 2 of Arrow. Whereas season 1 saw Oliver Queen's crime-fighting alter-ego known as simply The Hood or even The Vigilante, season 2 saw Ollie's 'other' persona become seen as an out-and-out hero, and he was slowly given the moniker of The Arrow. Additionally, in a move that pleased many fans, the hooded attire of The Arrow was given a domino mask. In fairness to the show and to the crew behind it, they do tend to pick up on the vibe of the fans, and Oliver's use of eye make-up rather than a mask had many fanboys in uproar, particularly when he'd be standing so close to certain characters that were so familiar with Oliver Queen yet they, for some reason, couldn't decipher that the hooded hero stood next to them was the famous playboy of Starling City. Yes, the show still has this problem from time-to-time, but the full Arrow persona is served a lot better by having some form of mask, even if it took the arrival of Grant Gustin's Barry Allen to give Oliver a prod in the right direction on that particular topic. And with the newfound hero status of The Arrow, the Emerald Archer managed to turn many non-believers, such as Detective Lance, into true believers.

And here he is, a bona fide hero, as the story for season 3 picks up 6 months after season 2's finale. From what we can tell, and from what has been reported, Starling City is in a good place. As Diggle says to Oliver early on in the new season, this is likely as good as it's ever gonna get in terms of a peaceful watch for The Arrow. What else has gone on in that 6 months? Well, first up, Roy Harper has now taken the much-rumoured leap to becoming a hero of his own. Literally as soon as Roy first appeared in the show, many were speculating whether he would end up taking on one of his comic book aliases, such as Speedy, Arsenal or Red Arrow, at some point in the show's run. The name of Speedy was seemingly a no go, with Thea Queen often given that nickname by Ollie, so that left Red Arrow and Arsenal as the next options. Since Oliver Queen's character isn't ever referred to (bar one mock suggestion in season 1) as Green Arrow, it would be hard to get away with calling Roy by the Red Arrow moniker, meaning that Arsenal was the most likely suggestion. And so it has proven, as there's already been images and footage released depicting Roy as Arsenal and in some impressive new duds. At least now maybe he'll get the chance to hang up the red hoodie that makes him stand out as nothing more than a brooding teenager who's going through an EMO stage of listening to too much Alkaline Trio.

As has been the case for the last two seasons, Diggle and Felicity will also be at Oliver's side to assist him in protecting Starling City going forward, or so we presume. In an interesting turn of events, early preview footage shows Oliver and Digg at odds, with Oliver no longer wanting the help of the right-hand



man who has served him so well and so often. Then again, the end of season 2 saw Diggle hear that Agent Michaels was pregnant and that the particular bun in her oven had been sown by his very own seed. Could it be that Oliver doesn't want to be father-to-be Diggle in harm's way, or could there be more to it? Whilst Oliver and Diggle seem to be at odds, the relationship between Oliver and Felicity (online it's affectionately known as Olicity, don't you know?) seems to be developing the other way. Now the finale of season 2 had some truly shocking moments, but Oliver revealing that Felicity was the love of his life was arguably the biggest jaw-dropper of the climactic episode. Of course, that was all shown to be a ruse to catch Slade Wilson off-guard so that The Arrow could take him down, but still... fans were hoping there was more to it than just a smoke and mirrors magic trick to fool Deathstroke. So with that in mind, season 3 will see Oliver and Felicity go on a date. As in a 'date' date - Stephen Amell and writer/producer Marc Guggenheim have both confirmed that it will very much be a real date between the two. Thing is, it doesn't go all that well from what we can see, particularly for Felicity, as early footage shows her in a bad way. Could it be, as ever with these things, that somebody gate-crashes these two potential lovebirds?

The deal with Oliver looking at his relationship with Felicity is said to be just part of the character trying to see if there is more out there for him than just being The Arrow. No, we don't mean he's looking for a quick 'friends-with-benefits' scenario with young Miss Smoak, but Ollie is at a point where he's now comfortable with being The Arrow, with being the protector of Starling City, with being a hero. He wants to see if it is possible to have a life away from the hood, a regular life as Oliver Queen. For anybody that's ever read a comic book or seen a superhero show of any sort in the past, chances are you'll know that having a life away from the tights/cape/cowl/hood/tiny purple pants (we're looking at you, Hulk) is near impossible for a hero. Hey, nobody said that this life was going to be easy. Oliver's want to balance a regular life with a hero life is something that is questioned by one of the looming Big Bads of the new season, but we'll get to that in a little while.

## NEW HEROES BRING ABOUT NEW VILLAINS

With Oliver Queen's Arrow now a fully-fledged, card-carrying member of the hero club (or should that be Justice League?), we can be expecting to see an appearance or two in season 3 from another hero - The Flash! Arrow's season 2 mid-season finale saw Barry Allen's 'accident', and that itself has been spun-off into The CW's *The Flash*, which debuts later this year. Now whilst it's nice to have seen Barry Allen sharing the small screen with Oliver Queen, Barry's transformation into The Flash is a game-changer for The Arrow's world. You see, similar to how Clark Kent crash-landed in Smallville, in, er, Smallville, accidentally caused the creation of many (far too many) freak-of-the-week Kryptonite-infected villains, it appears that Barry's traumatic run-in with a particle accelerator and a lightning bolt has created lots of other meta-humans with insane powers. We've already heard of some of the super-powered villains that The Flash will be up against in his show, such as Weather Wizard and Plastique, so in a universe shared with Arrow, will any of these meta-humans show up in Starling City to give the Emerald Archer some grief? We expect so, much like how The Flash himself has been confirmed to be sharing screen-time with The Arrow in the future. We already know that The Battling Bowman will appear to give the confused Barry Allen some advice in *The Flash*'s pilot, but it's also been confirmed that episode 8 of both *The Flash*'s first season and Arrow's third season will be a crossover event, and Arrow's Felicity Smoak will also be appearing in episode 4 of *The Flash*. So in a world that is so clearly shared between these two heroes, you'd have to think that some of the other meta-humans created by Barry's accident will venture into Starling City, and not all of them will be as well-meaning as the Scarlet Speedster.

As well as The Flash appearing in this upcoming season of Arrow, word came out that a "handsome, enigmatic and highly intelligent entrepreneur" with a tragic past will debut in season 3. Added to that, this character will use their smarts to become a tech-powered

superhero. When this news came out, many presumed that the character would be Blue Beetle. Instead, it was revealed that former Superman, Brandon Routh, will be playing Ray Palmer, aka The Atom, in the show. If becoming a superhero wasn't enough, Palmer will also be looking to take over Queen Consolidated, and is going to be the third cog in a potential Oliver/Felicity/Ray love triangle. A rival of Oliver's both on a personal and professional level, there's plenty of potential in a great dynamic developing between Stephen Amell and the naturally likable and charismatic Routh. Similarly, another hero who will appear in season 3 will be Ted Grant, aka Wildcat. In the comics a supreme athlete and fighter, the character will be played by *House of Payne*'s J.R. Ramirez. As for his role in the show, all we know at the time of writing is that Ted Grant will have some ties to Katie Cassidy's Laurel Lance, who herself is said to make certain steps closer to her comic book Black Canary persona this season, although sister Sara Lance is doing more than fine as the show's Canary for now. Whether something happens to Sara that causes Laurel to don the tights remains to be seen.

Whilst Ray Palmer is to be introduced to the modern-day Oliver Queen, the island flashbacks of seasons 1 and 2 are no more. Instead, Oliver's flashbacks will take place in Hong Kong, with season 2's finale seeing him finally escape the island. Whereas the steel-willed Amanda Waller will be present in Hong Kong, so will two newcomers who will act as mentors of sorts for Oliver. Playing Maseo Yamashiro will be Steel's Karl Yune, whilst *Sin City*'s Devon Aoki will play Tatsu Yamashiro, aka Katana. In the comic book world, things don't end well for this married couple, with Maseo falling victim to Katana's magical sword. Thing is, Katana's sword has the power to hold the souls of whomever falls at her hands. Whether Arrow eventually touches upon that is up for debate, given how the show has generally gone for a 'grounded-in-reality' approach to most characters and aspects of the series. For now, at least, the Yamashiros will act as mentors and handlers for Oliver during his Hong Kong days.

Bringing things back to modern-day Starling City, The Arrow will be going up against a new incarnation of a familiar foe. Whilst the Emerald Archer fought Seth Gabel's Count in both seasons 1 and 2, the Joker-lite villain was offed during this most recent run. When word came that season 3 would see a villain appear who uses chemicals to alter people's minds, some quarters suggested that we may be about to see long-time Batman foe The Scarecrow appear. Sadly this rumour proved to be bogus, but instead we will get a new version of Count Vertigo. This time played by Peter Stormare (*The Big Lebowski*), the character will be called Werner Zyle, which just so happens to be the comic book alias of Count Vertigo. Stormare's character, similar to Gable's, will be a peddler of the lethal Vertigo drug. Whilst seeing Stormare in anything is always pretty cool, it's nowhere near as cool as the new big bad that's in town.

Yes, a lot of season 3 is expected to revolve around Malcolm Merlyn and the fact that Thea Queen has seemingly turned to the dark side and joined formerly-deceased daddy dearest, but the big news is that Ra's al Ghul will be presiding over this upcoming season of events. Now, nobody has been cast as The Demon's Head as of going to print, but we have already seen footage (from the head down) of Ra's. All we can say is that the attention to detail in his outfit looks phenomenal. Let's hope that The CW have somebody in mind who can bring the complexities of Ra's to life. Given how daughter Nyssa and The League of Assassins appeared a couple of times in season 2, plus the ties of Canary and Malcolm Merlyn to Ra's, it's a natural step to finally bring the character to the show. Many thought that Ra's was too much of a big-name Batman character to bring to Arrow's world, but luckily that's proved not to be the case. A truly marvellous character in his methods, ideology, and moral compass, the addition of Ra's al Ghul can only be a massively positive thing.

## STARLING CITY AND BEYOND

As mentioned, season 2 culminated in Oliver finally getting off that damn island. That means no more island flashbacks, but instead we'll get to see the young Queen in Hong Kong,





seemingly held captive under the order of Amanda Waller. Given the often strong stance of The Wall, it should be interesting to see how her no-bullshit approach fares with Ollie during his Hong Kong stay. Early footage from the season has already shown Ollie vow to keep trying to escape Waller's clutches. As she puts it, though, it isn't hard to kill a man who the whole world believes is already dead. Then again, it's quite hard to kill a man who we know is clearly alive several years later, patrolling the streets of Starling City. In terms of the modern-day, season 2 saw Waller reveal her Suicide Squad. Could it be that season 3 will see her utilise the team again? And could that mean the Harley Quinn tease that had so many fans dowsing their drawers gets further explored in this new season? Fingers crossed. Regardless of whether Mr. J's main squeeze does get a full run out, the sensible money is on Waller using some variation of The Suicide Squad during season 3's run.

Having already seen Barry Allen spin off to *The Flash*, there is plenty other potential pies for Arrow to get its fingers into. Before season 3 airs, Arrow has got itself a special spin-off comic called *Arrow: Season 2.5*, which will tie up any loose ends and questions that are left from season 2's climax, the main one of which seems to be what happened to Detective Lance after he seemed to suffer a heart-attack as the season came to an end. A similar comic, *Flash: Season Zero*, will also be released for the Scarlet Speedster fans out there who cannot wait for the Arrow spin-off to arrive. The Arrow tie-in book will be available digitally as soon as September 1st, with the print edition to follow on October 8th, whilst *The Flash* tie-in drops digitally on September 8th and in print on October 1st. But away from comic book tie-ins, there really is a great world out there for The Arrow to explore.

We've seen Starling City and Central City on screen, with several references to Bludhaven and even one to Ferris Air, and there are regular rumours that Arrow may see the arrival or expansion of characters from/to elsewhere. The big rumour that keeps rearing its head is that Dick Grayson will appear as Nightwing at some point. Yes, that would be all kinds of cool, but it all really depends on what direction the DC cinematic world is going to take and if they're going to use that character any time soon. Away from Nightwing, the other big shout is that Hal Jordan, aka Green Lantern, will appear down the line. Hal Jordan, yes we could buy that happening, but bringing GL into the fold seems a bit out of tone for a show with such a grounded, street-level approach. Still, stranger things have happened. And then there's Barbara Gordon, a character who is regularly linked to the show due to her Birds of Prey connection to both Canary and The Huntress. Certain speculation even claims that Babs will appear in an episode as a kindred spirit for Felicity. It's not beyond impossible, but it's far from confirmed at this stage. Similarly, another claim is that Jessica De Gouw's Huntress will get her own spin-off show. On this one, executive producer Marc Guggenheim has actually gone on record as saying he'd love to do a Huntress series. Still, this is another one that seems unlikely right now.

## TOO MUCH, TOO SOON

AT STARBURST, we could quite happily sing the praises of Arrow's second season until we were hoarse with fanboy excitement. The thing is, after such a truly exquisite season of television, has the show outdone itself already? How can the likes of Guggenheim and Andrew Kreisberg manage to equal or even top what we've seen over this last year? It's most definitely a tall order, but one must have faith. Credit has to go where credit is due, though, for the cast and crew of Arrow delivered something truly special with season 2, with it unravelling as delicately and lovingly as that one Christmas present that isn't socks, underwear, chocolate or smellies. This was a season of TV that was meticulously planned and crafted in order to keep its audience on its toes, not to mention giving said audience regular rewards, be it in the short-term or with the long-term in mind. At this stage, the guys behind the show have our full faith that they will keep hitting the high standards that they have now set themselves. Much like Stephen Amell has now become completely comfortable in his Oliver Queen/

Arrow skin, the show's writers and producers have become equally as comfortable with delivering the product that their fans crave. And Amell truly has become the quintessential Arrow by this stage. What truly stands out about Amell's performance is the little nuances, the small details, the movements, the delivery, not to mention some truly stunning stunt work (largely his own and often posted to his social media channels for impressive viewing). In a world where there's often a clamour to take a successful TV show to the big screen, we're more than happy for Arrow to keep developing its own world and giving us a constantly evolving weekly story. You could even go as far as to say that the show has done so well in developing its supporting characters, there are times when an episode needs only the slightest of appearances from its titular hero, and that is a sign of a show that is something truly special.

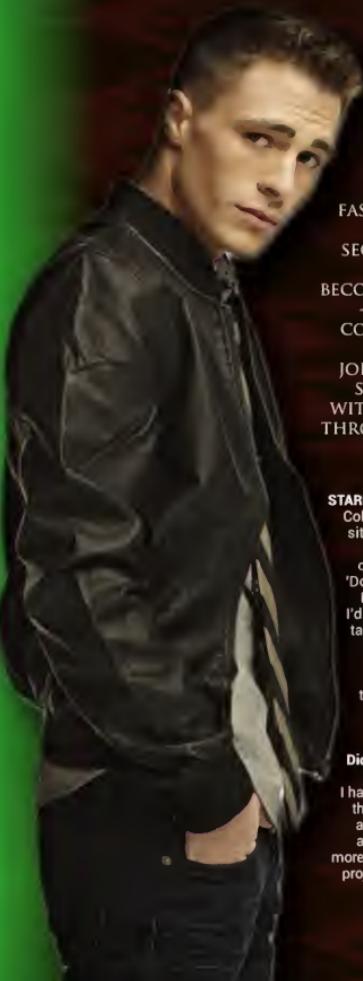
So where does The Arrow go from here? The only family he has are former step-father Walter Steele (Colin Salmon) and sister Thea. With Thea turning to Malcolm Merlyn after losing trust in those once close to her, will we see her going up against former lover Roy and brother Oliver? That seems a given, although her relationship with Malcolm is looking to be a rocky road all of its own. And then there's the subject of Roy Is Oliver now at a point where he can truly trust his protégé, set to be newly dubbed Arsenal, to keep his rage under control? Then there's the return of Sara Lance's Canary, what seems to be a developing business partnership between Ollie and Laurel Lance, the possible attempt to ignite a romance with Felicity, the butting of heads with Diggle, the potential loss of Queen Consolidated to Ray Palmer, and the uncertainty of whether he can truly balance the life of a hero with the simple life of just being Oliver Queen. It appears that The Arrow truly has a lot on his plate as we await season 3, and that's before we even get to the small matter of Ra's al Ghul. From what we can tell, it seems as if The Demon's Head will be encouraging The Arrow to give up on Oliver Queen and just dedicate himself to the being the Emerald Archer. Regardless of what troubles come knocking at his door, if season 3 can be anywhere near as good as season 2, it will be must-see-TV. We've been told many times that Arrow will not be tying into the cinematic DC world anytime soon, so let's sit back and enjoy the ever-developing story of one man and his bow. It's time to take aim and fire for the bullseye once more.

*Season 3 of ARROW will premiere on Sky 1 this October.*

# TEAM ARROW INTERVIEWS

WORDS: PAUL MOUNT

## COLTON HAYNES



FIRST APPEARING IN SEASON ONE'S 'DODGER', COLTON PLAYS ROY HARPER, INITIALLY A CHEAP THUG WHO STEALS THEA QUEEN'S PURSE. WHEN OLIVER QUEEN/ARROW SAVES HIS LIFE, ROY BECOMES FASCINATED BY THE HOODED VIGILANTE AND IN THE SECOND SEASON, PROMOTED TO SERIES REGULAR, ROY BECOMES A VIGILANTE HIMSELF - WITH POTENTIALLY FATAL CONSEQUENCES. BY THE END OF THE SEASON ROY HAS JOINED TEAM ARROW AND IS SET TO BATTLE SIDE-BY-SIDE WITH THE MAN IN THE HOOD THROUGHOUT THE UPCOMING THIRD SEASON...

**STARBURST:** Tell us how you got the part...

Colton Haynes: It was so random! I was sitting at home one day and I got a call from [executive producer/series co-creator] Greg Berlanti and he was like 'Do you want to come be on the show?' I said 'Are you kidding me?' Of course I'd love to' so I went into a meeting and talked to him and [executive producer/series co-creator] Andrew Kreisberg and luckily I look just like the comic book character so they let me be on the show! Three episodes turned into six and then six turned into... well, becoming a regular on the show!

**Did you have any inkling that Roy would or could become a series regular?**

I had no idea. It was only supposed to be three and then they asked for me again and I was saying to them 'Why are you asking me this, of course I'd love to do more!' I was going to go and do a different project and they got word of that so they offered me full-time. I guess I kind of tricked them into hiring me full-time!

**Were you familiar with the comic book character at this point? No, but I'm very familiar now! My brother's tired of me telling this story but he called me almost in tears – I didn't tell anyone in my family because I thought I was only going to do a few episodes – and he said 'Why would you not tell me something like this? You're playing Roy Harper!' He freaked out and basically gave me the whole back-story and I was thinking 'Wow, this is amazing' so then I went and did the research and realised how awesome it was. Luckily I had my brother to back me up if I had any questions!**

**Did they give you any clues as to where Roy was going in the series in the long-term?**

There were a few phone conversations. Obviously season 2 was action-packed with so many different characters but I like the way they gave a few of the characters, mine included, time to grow, so now that way they can give justice to the characters who need it at the time. Season 3 is going to be a really great season for my character because I'm now Team Arrow! They've only told me a little bit about what's coming but it's going to be fun.

**Having spent two years on the *Teen Wolf* series, were you concerned about joining another show full-time?**  
Are you kidding? I really just love having a job, man! I remember, when I first came to LA, never having a job, which sucked because it's very difficult to get one! I was lucky enough to be in shows prior to this one which had supernatural aspects and the fans are so nice and supportive and never mean, so it's always good to have really friendly people in the



background. Social media helps because the more you are on there talking to them and getting their feedback the better and I've always been good with stuff like that. It's really nice to hear what people are saying, that they've been lifelong fans of this character who's now growing on the show and they can watch it on TV as opposed to reading it in the comic books. Then there are characters like Felicity who was hired just as a one-day guest star but she did so well that they basically made her virtually the standout of the show; that's to do with her hard work and the fact that the fans love her.

**Have you been told what to expect for Roy in the coming third series - or even beyond as the show's such a big hit - as the character develops?**

I haven't been told anything two or three years in advance. They'll tell you little things and you're just waiting for the scripts and thinking 'When's this happening? Oh, it's not happening yet!' I have been told of a very intense love triangle which is going to happen which I'm hearing is going to be epic and a few of the very well-known characters from the DC Universe are going to appear. Now we've got *The Flash* there's the opportunity of maybe jumping back and forth between the two shows. They'll probably spend some time firming-up their characters but there's definitely crossover potential.

**Are you a fan of all the running, jumping and fighting action stuff that now comes with a role like this?**

You wouldn't be able to tell but I'm not exactly the most co-ordinated person! I'm not a martial artist, I'm not a stunt guy so I have the most amazing stunt double who basically does all of it for me because we wouldn't have the budget to keep me around for hours to make me get it right. I've had a few injuries in the past doing stunts; I got attacked by a wolf doing *Teen Wolf* so these days I'm 'OK, I'm gonna sit this one out...' because the stunt guys are just incredible. I get to do some of it; they pop me in and I do some of the stuff which is fun and cool because I know it's going to look good.

**How much of the character is inspired by what you bring to the role as an actor?**

I think there's always something you can put into a character. It's nice to not just have a one-note character - Roy is on the outside but actually a little more sensitive on the inside. I pretty much identify with that; it's fun to play but also it's really cool because a lot of the time, especially in TV, they have time and they write towards you a little bit. With film it's different because what's on the page is what's on the screen. There's always little things they'll write and I'm thinking 'You wrote that because of me' which is fun but I guess that's in all the TV characters I've ever played.

**Why do you think superhero characters are so popular on both the TV and big screen at the moment?**

It's definitely escapism and I think we all have those dreams when we're a hero, we want to get the girl and all that kind of stuff and I think that's why, along with the fact that on TV shows like *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* and *Gotham* you get to watch it every week as opposed to a two-hour film you have to wait a couple of years for. It's a good way to see the characters evolve on a weekly basis. I think *Arrow* led the way for that really. Vampires and witches were the thing five years ago but it's moved away now into superheroes.

**How do you see Roy and Oliver's slightly frosty relationship developing in season three?**

Roy has always been a bit 'whatever' with Oliver who he sees as a bit spoilt but there's now a respect which I want to say is going to strengthen. Their 'brotherly' relationship is hopefully going to grow but with Oliver having to lie to so many people and Thea obviously not leaving town, Roy has to choose love over teamwork or family. I feel like it's going to be tricky with the amount of lies that are going on, specifically within Team Arrow and there's a great scene I had when I called Oliver out and said 'He's lying to us, are you guys blind?' so due to that everyone in Team Arrow in season 3 is going to be a little suspicious and thinking that maybe something is going on. So certain people are going to be forced to form little teams of their own and go off and do their own little secret missions. Stay tuned, basically!



# EMILY BETT RICKARDS

FIRST APPEARING IN SEASON ONE'S THIRD EPISODE, 'LONE GUNMEN', FELICITY SMOAK, EMPLOYED IN THE IT DEPARTMENT OF QUEEN INDUSTRIES, QUICKLY ESTABLISHED HERSELF AS A SMART, SASSY AND WITTY ADDITION TO THE SERIES, EVENTUALLY APPEARING IN SEVENTEEN EPISODES IN ARROW'S FIRST YEAR BEFORE BEING PROMOTED TO SERIES REGULAR FOR THE SECOND SEASON.

**STARBURST:** Felicity brings a lot of heart, warmth and humour to the show. As a character only originally envisaged as appearing in one episode, you must be really pleased with the way she's been received.  
**Emily Bett Rickards:** I'm so pleased because I've gotten to know her for two years now and she's become a very important part of me. I think she's a very good role model in a sense. She's very smart and dedicated and she doesn't really move from her opinions too strongly. She doesn't change her opinions to fit with other people but she realises her opinions don't need to be so solid if she realises she's wrong, and I find that humility appealing.

**How much of Felicity is Emily?**

I think there are parts of me in her and parts of her in me – especially the longer I get to play her. I hope I've given her the ability to be a little bit more challenging, to not retreat so much and she reminds me of the old motto 'stay true to yourself'. It really helps to play a character who's honest and doesn't take bullshit well.

**How did you feel when you were told that your one-shot character would be coming back into the series?**

I think it was within a week of doing the first episode I knew I was doing another one and I was like "Yes! Two episodes!" but now it's become my life! Felicity is in all twenty-three episodes of season two so my life became about Felicity which was very splendid and a great pleasure. She's out and about much more now, away from her computer screens and I enjoy shooting in different locations.

**How has Felicity developed from season one to season two?**

She's more in the thick of it now but she made a solid personal decision to be more in the thick of it whereas in the first season she was 'one foot in, one foot out'. In season two she's more game; she made the decision to be there so she's there. She knows that her work with Queen Consolidated comes second; she still has to





do that work because that's her front but she really believes in what they're doing. She likes having input which I think is something she didn't know about herself; she didn't know that she'd like collaborating as much as she likes computers.

#### **Do you get to have any input into the character?**

Our writers know her really well too and I have asked to maybe get to know her parents. I've stated I'd really like to see her apartment so hopefully those things will come in good time if they fit the story. I like talking about her to the people who write her and created her; it's just very nice that they have that similar love for her that I do.

#### **Season 2 saw hints of an attraction between Felicity and Barry Allen. Is this something we can expect to see more of in either Arrow or The Flash series?**

I'd like to see it develop but I'm not sure how it would happen. When he wakes up and he's no longer in Starling City I think Felicity would go and see him or he'd come to her because the last Felicity knew he was getting visits from another woman while he was in the hospital. She's like, 'Oh, cheating on me while you're still in a coma, you hot dog!'

#### **What about the scene in the season 2 finale where Oliver tells Felicity he loves her? It turned out to be a ruse at this point but is this something we'll see develop?**

I knew it was coming because we'd been talking about it for a while. We were trying to figure out how it was going to be written and we were all wondering what was going to happen and then, when we were reading it at the table, I was wailing 'The fans are going to *die* — and you and you and YOU and they're going

to be so disappointed. It's a heartbreaking moment but it's a heartbreak that's hopeful... whatever that means!

#### **Are you happy to stay with Arrow for the long haul?**

I'm interested to see where Felicity goes, it's been so interesting to get to know her for two years. It's a long time shooting, nine and a half months of the year and we get two weeks off at Christmas. But ultimately I have no idea where she's gonna go and when I have to say goodbye to her forever it'll break my heart.

#### **Beyond Arrow, where would you like to be in ten years time, professionally?**

I want to have my own comedy show. That might change in a few years but right now I'd like to do a duo-woman comedy show with a good friend of mine and that's what we're working on. The comedy in Felicity is my favourite part to play along with her honesty.

#### **How are your own computer skills?**

Oh, I'm terrible with computers, the worst. I couldn't figure out my printer the other day so I just put a sheet over it so I wouldn't have to look at it! I called my friend and said, 'I'm emailing you something, print it off please' and he said, 'Didn't you just buy a printer?'

#### **What's next for Felicity in season 3?**

I don't know a lot about what's happening next year. Felicity ended up on a happy note, Thea not so much, but Team Arrow did in the sense that they did what they set out to do and I hope it'll start off light and that we get to meet her parents or at least one of them. It'd be nice but I don't know if it'll happen. They talked about it last season but there was no time, we went straight into 'save the world' mode!



Season 2 of ARROW is released on DVD/Blu-ray September 15th.





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# FORTHCOMING ATTRACTIONS

## NEW SEASON TV PREVIEW

By PAUL MOUNT



**I**s it that time already? We're now just weeks away from the arrival of the 2014/2015 TV season when the big US networks (and the smaller, often more ambitious cable stations) tear the dust-covers off their brand spanking shiny new shows for the Fall and cross their fingers (and probably their toes) that they've come up with the Next Big Thing. Predicting the hits and the has-beens has never been tougher; who'd have thought that expected big-hitter *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* would struggle after a promising start? Fox's *Sleepy Hollow* was surely too ridiculous to live and yet it became one of the year's breakout hits. The CW were so confident of their *Tomorrow People* reboot that they ordered a full 22-episode season - but the next stage in human evolution became extinct in May when the network binned their high-budget adventure. Fox's expensive futuristic cop show *Almost Human* starred Karl Urban and quickly went to the wall despite decent viewing figures, and NBC's atmospheric reimagining of *Dracula* had a stake driven through its heart after just one season.

So what has 2014/15 got in store? There appears to be slightly fewer new genre shows on their way this year and in this exclusive STARBURST feature we take a look at the new kids on the TV block, the shows which are coming back for more and even a few tasty homegrown offerings...

### AGENT CARTER

Although Marvel Studios continue to dominate at the Box Office with their immaculately scheduled raft of superhero movies, their first foray into TV - last year's debut season of *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* - wasn't such a resounding success. The first episode, screened in the US in September 2013, pulled in an impressive 12.12 million viewers but the numbers fell week-on-week, reaching a low of 5.37 with the penultimate episode of the 22-week run.

Undeterred, ABC are pressing ahead with a short-run 'event' series - eight episodes - based on the exploits of Peggy Carter.

Due to air from January 2015, the show, set in 1946, will see Hayley Atwell reprise the character (as seen in both *Captain America* movies and the *Marvel One-Shot, Agent Carter*) as she balances the mundane work she does for the Strategic Scientific Reserve whilst undertaking covert missions with Howard Stark (Dominic Cooper). Developed by Tara Butters and Michelle Fazekas (*Reaper*) and with the pilot episode written by *The Winter Soldier's* Christopher Markus and Stephen McFeely, it's envisaged that the series will tell one serialised story, a format likely to be repeated should it be picked up for a further run next year or in 2016. The show is expected to air during the mid-season break of the second season of *S.H.I.E.L.D.*

**Hit potential:** Tough call. *S.H.I.E.L.D.*'s travails suggest that whilst audiences love the bang-crash-boom of the tentpole superhero movies, they're not much interested in the antics of the background characters who clean up when the costumes and capes have gone home. *Agent Carter* is likely to be a classy production with a quality cast, but its 1940s setting and the obvious lack of men-in-tights might turn away the punters.

### FOREVER

ABC appear to be attempting to combine elements of the ever-popular 'cold case' police procedural with a dash of *Sherlock Holmes* quirkiness and just a soupçon of supernatural mystery in the

forthcoming *Forever*. Intrigued? You might not be. The series is created by Matthew Miller and stars Ioan Gruffudd (*Fantastic Four*) playing Dr Henry Morgan, New York City's star medical examiner and a man with a deep, dark secret. He studies the dead not only to solve crimes but also in the hope of finding out why he's been alive for two hundred years and appears to be immortal. Every time he dies (and it seems that he dies a lot), he's 'reborn' in water, naked (with hilarious consequences). He's teamed up with a new partner, Jo Martinez (Alana de la Garza) who is impressed by Henry's "remarkable observational skills." Each week the pair investigate a new mystery and slowly the layers of Henry's long past are peeled away. Meanwhile, only Henry's best friend (Judd Hirsch) knows our protagonist's mysterious secret. Lorraine Toussaint from Netflix hit *Orange is the New Black* has also been announced as a recurring cast member, playing Martinez's grizzled Police boss Lt Joanna Reece.

**Hit potential:** Despite sounding like a rather dull and muddy combination of too



many clichés, ABC are placing *Forever* in a Tuesday night slot following the second season of the ailing *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* If *Forever* catches on it could give *S.H.I.E.L.D.* a lift, but if the latter continues to hemorrhage viewers (and it doesn't have that many left as it goes into season two), both shows could stumble.

### THE WHISPERS

Based on Ray Bradbury's short story 'Zero Hour', *The Whispers* (formerly *The Visitors*) is an Amblin Entertainment production for ABC and thus counts Steven Spielberg amongst its executive producers. The show tells of a 'quiet invasion' of Earth by a race of aliens beginning its takeover by using "the most unlikely and unsuspecting inhabitants on the planet - the children." The pilot is directed by co-executive producer Soo Hugh (*Under the Dome*) and directed by Mark Romanek (*Never Let Me Go*) and stars American Horror Story's Lily Rabe and wonky-mouthed former *Heroes* star Milo Ventimiglia.

**Hit potential:** Creepy kids and their 'imaginary friends' are always a good bet for a quick dose of sci-fi-tinged horror. *The Whispers* evokes everything from John Wyndham's *Midwich Cuckoos* and *Chocky* to the *Torchwood* 'Children of Earth' mini-series. If the show can keep up the suspense and mystery of its trailer it might stand a good chance of becoming a sleeper hit for ABC when it launches mid-season.

### CONSTANTINE

NBC's *Constantine* is one of the more surprising and potentially interesting of the new season commissions. Based on the DC/Vertigo *Hellblazer* comics title (and already brought to life in the 2005 feature film misfire starring Keanu Reeves), the TV series will star Matt Ryan as dark magician John Constantine battling his own demons as he fights against gathering supernatural forces. Angélica Celaya recently replaced the pilot's Lucy Griffiths (*Robin Hood*) who had been cast as female lead Liv; Celaya will play

the original comic character Zed. Also in the show's cast is former *Lost* star Harold Perrineau as Manny, "an authoritative angel" who steps into other people's bodies as he tries to protect Constantine from the forces of evil and Charles Halford as Constantine's oldest friend, Chas Chandler. Fears that *Constantine* might be a little too dark and extreme for a major US Network appear to be gathering steam with the announcement that Constantine, a ferocious chain-smoker in the comic, won't be lighting up on TV due to network restrictions. *Constantine*'s pilot is directed by Britain's Neil Marshall (*The Descent*) from a script by Daniel Cerone and David Goyer.

**Hit potential:** Less campy and tongue-in-cheek than the likes of *Supernatural* and *Grimm*, *Constantine* may suffer if it strays too far from the tone of the comic strip as aficionados may take against it, but conversely it may prove to be weird and high concept for a network audience.

### EMERALD CITY

Frank L Baum's *Wizard of Oz* receives "an extreme make-over" in this new series from NBC. But we don't seem to be in Kansas - or indeed, anything recognisable as Oz, anymore. Searching for clues which will help her track down her

biological mother, 20-year-old Dorothy Gale breaks into a sinister underground facility somewhere in the Midwest. As you do. But her daring adventure is thwarted by the arrival of facility's security staff so she steals a K9 security dog (no, not that one) and drives off into the night. But oh no... there's a raging tornado in her path and before you can say "Somewhere over the rainbow" she's whipped off into another world, one very different from our own. This is described by the show's press blurb as, "a mystical land of competing kingdoms, lethal warriors, dark magic and a bloody battle for supremacy." Across the ten episodes of this "event" series Dorothy becomes "a headstrong warrior who holds the fate of kingdoms in her hands".

With nary a munchkin or a cowardly lion in sight, this is clearly Oz reimagined for the *Game of Thrones* generation. The series is created by Matthew Arnold who co-produces with Josh Friedman and at the time of writing casting has yet to be announced, nor has there been a whiff - or even a light breeze - of a trailer. Perhaps if we all click our heels together three times...

**Hit potential:** The world of Oz remains enduringly popular - 2013's *Oz the Great and Powerful* was a huge Box Office success - so *Emerald City* is sure to attract a decent-sized curious first night audience. But what looks suspiciously like a cynical attempt to turn Oz into Westeros might make it a bitter pill to swallow for a primetime NBC audience, and a turn-off for fantasy fans quite happy with HBO's epic *Game of Thrones*, thanks all the same.



THE WHISPERS



CONSTANTINE



## GOTHAM

Fox's *Gotham* looks set to be one of the most controversial of the new season's network offerings. Airing from September in the US, the series offers yet another take on the legend of (the) Batman and his various friends and foes. The initial focus of the series was to introduce and explore an idealistic and ambitious new detective on Gotham City's Police force - that'd be James Gordon - as he and his new partner Harvey Bullock investigate the murder of Thomas and Martha Wayne. Their son Bruce (do you see where they're going with this?) is in the care of family butler Alfred, and Gordon becomes even more determined to find the killers of the boy's parents. But to forge closer and more identifiable links with the Bat-Verse, the show's remit has now broadened and in the course of his investigations Gordon crosses paths with prototype versions of some of Gotham's future villains: Selina Kyle (Catwoman), Oswald Cobblepot (Penguin) and Edward Nygma (Riddler). Egghound and King Tut are surely shoo-ins somewhere down the line...

*Gotham* has been created by Bruno Heller (*Rome*) with

Danny Cannon (most recently late of *The CW's* short-lived *The Tomorrow People* reboot) on hand to direct. The cast includes Ben McKenzie (*The OC*) as Gordon with Sean (son of Jon) Pertwee as Alfred.

**Hit potential:** Seriously? Batman again?! After countless reboots of the film series - with Ben Affleck next stepping into the Batmobile for 2016's *Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice* - and endless animated series, it's hard to imagine anyone's too psyched about what appears to be a lazy rehash of ideas and characters we're all a bit bored with by now. The trailer for the pilot pretty much redefines the expression 'nothing to get excited about.' Frankly, some of us are more worked-up about the forthcoming DVD/Blu-ray release (at last!) of the classic 1960s Adam West *Batman* series. *Gotham* is going to have to pull something pretty special out of its cowl if it's going to stick around.

## THE LAST MAN ON EARTH

If you're after a few quick belly-laughs then Fox is the place to go this year. After all, what's more side-splittingly hilarious than the end of the world? *The Last Man on Earth* is created by and stars former *Saturday Night Live* alumnus Will Forte and features the exploits



of... well, the last man on Earth, after an unknown cataclysm has wiped out the rest of humanity. The series is created by Phil Lord & Chris Miller, the wildly successful team behind the likes of *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs*, *The Lego Movie* and *Jump Street* movies.

**Hit potential:** Hard to know quite what to make of this one. The trailer is hugely atmospheric and yet deeply melancholic and only vaguely amusing - but quite how it's going to sustain its idea (much less generate decent gags) if Forte really does carry the show alone is hard to imagine. The involvement of Miller and Lord suggests that this will be one show to keep a close eye on. It's likely either to be a breath of fresh air, smash hit, or a peculiar, noble failure.

## THE FLASH

Having created a huge hit out of *Arrow*, a show based on a third-tier DC Comics character, The CW Network look set to knock it out of the park with *The Flash*, debuting in October in the US. With Flash's alter ego Barry Allen already introduced in three episodes of the second season of *Arrow* (the last of which effectively served as a prelude to the spin-off), the series will see Allen awaken from the coma he was plunged into following an accident with the STAR Labs particle accelerator. He'll quickly (geddit?) realise that he has been imbued with the ability to move at superhuman speeds.

*Arrow* has become must-see television due to its dense plotting and subtle recreation of characters and situations from the 'Green Arrow' comic mythology, but at its heart it's a more realistic story



of vigilantism and extreme heroism. *The Flash* will be aiming for a more straightforward superhero aesthetic; comic supervillains Professor Zoom and Killer Frost are already as good as confirmed and former *Tomorrow People* star Robbie Amell was recently announced as playing half of the 'dual identity' character Firestorm. William Sadler (*Roswell*) is also on board as twisted businessman Simon Stagg who, as DC Comics readers may recall, has links to the character of Metamorpho, a shape shifting elemental created when Stagg's daughter's boyfriend Rex Mason was exposed to a radioactive meteorite. Meanwhile, Barry Allen/*The Flash* is played by twenty-four year old Grant Gustin with Candice Patton as Iris West, Barry's best friend/potential love interest. Also in the cast is John Wesley Shipp as Barry's father Henry. Shipp, of course, played The Flash in the excellent but short-lived 1990 CBS series created by Danny Bilson and Paul De Meo (*The Rocketeer*).

**Hit potential:** The CW Network generally have a good hit rate when it comes to teen-flavoured genre shows but *Arrow* has transcended the expectations of the subgenre by creating a real, believable and slightly more adult variation on the theme. *The Flash* may skew slightly younger due to its more comic strip sensibilities, but the enthusiastic trailer suggests a show that could be in for a long... erm... run.

### IZOMBIE

It's not exactly *The Walking Dead*. Nor is it even Britain's own *In the Flesh*. The teen-friendly CW Network has decided to jump on the zombie bandwagon with their new series based (loosely, it appears) on the DC/Vertigo comic created by Chris Roberson and Michael Allred. Developed by Rob Thomas (creator of *Veronica Mars*) and Diane Ruggiero (co-executive producer on *Veronica Mars*) the series stars Rose McIver (*Once Upon a Time*) as Olivia Moore, a medical student whose intricately planned life path takes a turn for the undead when she rocks up at a party which turns into a zombie feeding frenzy. *Veronica Mars*, although never a massive break-out hit,

shared the same pop culture/sassy teen vibe as Joss Whedon's *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (Whedon was an obsessive fan of Thomas' show). *iZombie* suggests that The CW Network are going back to a style of series which combines fast-paced action and whip-crack wit with a strong, empowered - if slightly dead - female lead character.

After her resurrection, Liv does her best to blend in with the rest of humanity by adopting a pale 'Goth' persona and she takes on a job at the Seattle Coroner's office so she can satisfy her brain-craving by feasting on the remains of the recently-deceased. But in doing so she absorbs and exhibits the talents and personality traits of her once-living meals. Liv's boss discovers her secret and Liv passes herself off as a psychic to team up with local homicide cop Clive Babineux so she can use 'special knowledge' of criminal activity and crime scenes to bring to justice those responsible for providing her with her most recent square meal. Liv lives but, as the CW's Press release concludes, "it's not the same as being alive again, but at least [she] finds purpose in her undead existence by helping Clive solve the murders of those who are indeed fully dead."

Thomas has promised that the show (which is currently reshooting and recasting its pilot but which gained a very positive reaction during its footage presentation at the recent San Diego Comic-Con) will be an action-packed zombie/police procedural. We wouldn't recommend holding your breath waiting for the comic book series' were-terrier 1960s ghost and paint-ball-vampires to make the transition over to the TV series. But the cast list of largely-unknown actors - Malcolm Goodwin as Babineux, David Anders as recurring drug-dealing evil zombie buddy Blaine DeBeers, Robert Buckley as Major Lilywhite - suggests that The CW are shaking up their preferred series model of largely non-threatening supernatural adventures

starring massively photogenic teen pin-ups and adding a dash of gruesome grey matter, high-kicking action and zippy, breathless, witty dialogue. More *The Wacky Dead* than *The Walking Dead*.

**Hit potential:** The concept for the series seems to be so diluted from the comic book that long-time fans may be alienated from the outset. It's potentially a tamer zombie show than we're used to but it'll be interesting to see how a mainstream audience takes to an undead brain-eating hero...

### THE MESSENGERS

*The Messengers* is expected to air mid-season on The CW Network. Co-executive producer Eoghan O'Donnell explains that the show concerns "five disparate strangers who die and wake up when a mysterious object crashes to Earth; eventually they realise that they will determine the fate of the world". The five lead characters all discover that they have a gift which is more of a burden and that they have been given a specific destiny. But do they allow destiny to be fulfilled or do they rebel against what appears to be pre-ordained for them? Then a sinister stranger appears (naked, of course, this is The CW) in the impact crater and begins to exert his influence on The Messengers. "This is a story about the battle between good and evil in all of us," says O'Donnell.

The series stars the likes of Shantel VanSanten (*One Tree Hill*), Jon Fletcher (*Revolution*), Sofia Black Delta (*Skins*) and Joel Courtney (*Super 8*).

**Hit potential:** Preview footage suggests decent production values and the potential for an intriguing ongoing story arc, but there's something generic and uninvolved about both the look of the show and its concept. This one could hit the buffers early.

### HEROES REBORN

It's a thirteen-episode reboot for Tim Kring's 'ordinary people with extraordinary abilities' series which ran from 2006 to 2010, but as yet details are thin on the ground about what fans can expect from NBC's unexpected relaunch of what was, in its first season, a genuine TV phenomenon. Kring, who launched the short-lived *Keifer Sutherland*



vehicle *Touch* following the cancellation of *Heroes*, recently admitted that plans for the show, expected to debut in 2015 after a special online digital series which will lay the foundations for the broadcast network series, are still in the early stages. "It's an ever-changing thing in my brain as to what it should be," he said. "And there's not a tremendous amount to say about it at this point." It's already been confirmed that Jack Coleman (the mysterious Noah Bennett) will return from the cast of the original series and whilst returns from other familiar characters haven't been ruled out, Kring has indicated that the new series is likely to strike out in new directions with new faces.

**Hit potential:** *Heroes* wasn't able to sustain the momentum of its massively successful first season in 2006/7 and it's unlikely that the show's had time to mature in its audiences' memories since its cancellation just four years ago. The new series might soar if it genuinely comes across as a fresh take on an old idea without too many ties to later episodes of the original run which viewers weren't

especially interested in. NBC will be hoping to resuscitate a former cash cow but, despite the enduring appeal of the 'super-powered humans' premise, the audience are quite likely to still remember how far and fast the series fell last time and stay away from a show they remember as being unceremoniously cancelled.

### AMERICAN HORROR STORY: FREAKSHOW

The fourth season of Ryan Murphy's perverse horror anthology arrives on the FX Network in October. As usual, the show's familiar repertory cast of actors will be back for the new series (this year just ten episodes) – Sarah Paulson, Jessica Lange, Evan Peters, Frances Conroy, Denis O'Hare – in an all-new story centred around one of the few remaining travelling freak shows in the 1950s. The versatile Lange, who has confirmed that this will be her last season in the show, will be playing a German ex-pat who is managing the freak show, whilst Paulson will play conjoined twins Bette and Dot and O'Hare will be "a collector of freaks." Oscar winner Kathy Bates, who made



AMERICAN HORROR STORY:  
FREAKSHOW

her debut in the horror franchise in the third series *Coven*, will return as a new character in *Freakshow* alongside Angela Bassett who also made her debut in the third series.

**Hit potential:** *American Horror Story* has tended to lose its way in the past due to its willful determination to confound, surprise and occasionally appall its audience. The third series was the show's most successful season yet, so there's no reason to expect series four to break the show's sinister, spooky spell.



## THE ONES THAT CAME BACK...

**W**hile many new shows fell at the first hurdle last year (and others took a tumble after their follow-up season – it was lights out for NBC's *Revolution* and ABC's *Neighbors* were moved on, for example), several are back for a second bite of the cherry, whilst others have already become part of the TV landscape and are just rolling on and on.

Originally envisaged as a 'limited series', ABC's *Resurrection*, the story of how small-town America copes with the return of long-dead loved ones, has been renewed for a second batch of episodes likely to begin airing in the US in March 2015 (while the UK still waits for the first). *Agents of S.H.I.E.L.D.* will be hoping to up its game (or at very least its ratings) in its second season and now-perennial fairytale favourite *Once Upon a Time* is back for a fourth year.

Over at CBS, hit sitcom and geek favourite *The Big Bang Theory* has already been renewed for three further series and Jim Caviezel will be back for a fourth season of surveillance crime prevention drama *Person of Interest*. NBC welcomes back *Grimm* for a fourth year and serial killer prequel drama *Hannibal* returns for a third year despite troublingly poor ratings. The CW Network powers ahead with a third season for *Arrow* (see page 32 for full details), a second, longer season of its successful post-apocalyptic survival show *The 100*, and sixth and second seasons respectively for *The Vampire Diaries* and its spin-off *The Originals*. The Winchester Brothers surely inch closer to

pensionable age as *Supernatural* returns for a frankly extraordinary tenth season; the show's ninth season pulled in very healthy ratings and there's no reason to suspect that the show doesn't have another couple of years in it yet. Puzzlingly, The CW Network have also renewed their reboot of *Beauty and the Beast*, a series with



a negligible audience and which has danced close to cancellation twice before. The only returning genre offering from Fox is *Sleepy Hollow*, a show which this very magazine said last year "could be put to sleep quite easily." The first season was so successful that Fox have extended its order for year two from 13 to 18 episodes. Well, what do we know!

Beyond the networks it's the cable stations which, as ever, are increasingly delivering the goods both creatively and in terms of viewing figures. AMC's *The Walking Dead*, back for a fifth season in October, continues to defy expectations with its fourth season finale watched by 15.66 million viewers, the show's third highest-ever rating. The much-mooted spin-off series, featuring an all-new cast and possibly taking the story right back to the original zombie virus outbreak, appears to be gathering momentum; although still untitled, it's expected to air as early as Autumn 2015 to run alongside *The Walking Dead* itself, which will be back for a sixth season barring an actual zombie apocalypse. You never know, A&E's excellent *Bates Motel* will be back for a third season in the Spring despite a drop in figures for its second series. HBO's insanely popular *Game of Thrones* has been renewed for at least two more seasons and Starz is sticking with *Da Vinci's Demons* despite the fact that no one seems to watch it. Showtime will bring its lurid Victorian thriller *Penny Dreadful* back for a second season, while Syfy continues its commendable expansion into original drama with a slew of new shows on their way across the next twelve months. And, amazingly, some of them might even be worth a look! Joining the popular *Defiance* and the renewed viral drama *Helix* are *12 Monkeys*, a remake of the 1995 Terry Gilliam film of the same name, an original zombie drama entitled *Z Nation* (a thirteen-episode series set three years after the



PENNY DREADFUL

zombie outbreak), and its own 'event' series, a six-part space opera entitled *Ascension* starring *Battlestar Galactica*'s Tricia Helfer, which is expected to launch in November.

Beyond the networks and the cable channels, of course, we have the brave new world of online and streaming TV. The likes of Amazon Prime and Netflix are now generating original content - Netflix are in the process of creating four new Marvel Studios superhero series (and a *Defenders* mini-series which will bring all four together) including the much-anticipated *Daredevil* (starring Charlie Cox), *Iron Fist*, *Luke Cage* and *Jessica Jones*. Also coming to Netflix (who make entire series available in one fell swoop for binge-viewing fanatics) is *Sense8*, a ten-episode collaboration between the Wachowskis (*The Matrix*) and *Babylon 5*'s J. Michael Straczynski in which eight people worldwide are able to communicate telepathically. Amazon Prime, meanwhile, have commissioned a full series based on Chris (*The X-Files*) Carter's apocalyptic drama *The After* which is likely to air in 2015.



BEAUTY AND THE BEAST

What's clear and inarguable is that the traditional model for TV viewing is changing rapidly and the American Networks are having to work ever harder to find shows that audiences will tune into and stick with. The idea of sitting and watching a TV show 'live' is now virtually anathema to an entire generation who would much rather record, stream or binge-watch at their leisure. What's also clear is that, in order to generate loyalty, the networks are having to think way outside the box and create much more imaginative and less routine dramas which will appeal to a much more affluent, cash-rich demographic. That's good news for genre fans; we're probably now more spoilt for choice than at any time in the



DEFIANCE



BATES MOTEL



HELIX



history of television. But conversely, shows have to fight to survive - the list of casualties from the 2013/14 season alone is brutal and uncompromising - but that's a small price to pay for the sheer scope and variety of shows now coming from the studios in search of an ever-fragmenting TV audience.

## FLYING THE FLAG...

British TV is still pitching in with a few cult shows now and again in between the soap operas and reality shows, and 2014/15 could be shaping up to be one of our better years in recent memory.

*Doctor Who* is back, of course; its eighth new season beginning on BBC One this very month. The first series to star new Doctor Peter Capaldi, twelve new episodes are ready to roll with a Christmas special filming in September. BBC One's *Atlantis* floundered during its first season, falling some way short of the popularity attained by its predecessor *Merlin* - a second season launches this autumn and the channel will be hoping for a steadier ship this time around. Russell T Davies & Phil Ford's popular children's fantasy *Wizards vs Aliens* returns shortly to CBBC for a third series (consisting of ten episodes) offering up "a new alien race and a whole variety of magical creatures" to join the show's perennial bad guys the Nekross. Also on CBBC, Debbie Moon's outstanding 'young werewolf' drama *Wolfblood* will return for a third season this autumn.

BBC Three may become purely an online platform sometime in the next eighteen months, but the channel is maintaining its reputation as a home for unusual new genre shows. With the fate of the widely acclaimed (but poorly-viewed) *In the Flesh* apparently as yet undecided, BBC Three



have announced that a new eight-episode fantasy drama is in the works. Described as "*a superhuman drama from the makers of Being Human*" (i.e. independent production company Touchpaper), *Tatau* tells of two friends from London who travel to the Cook Islands in the South Pacific. One of the friends, Kyle, who treated himself to a Maori-style tattoo before the trip, has a premonition of a killing and decides that together they must try to stop it. The show is a co-production between BBC Three and BBC America, whose acclaimed clone drama *Orphan Black* has been renewed for a third season.

Also due sometime before the end of this millennium is the long-awaited seven-episode adaptation of Susanna Clarke's massive fantasy opus *Jonathan Strange & Mr Norrell* starring Eddie Marsan, Marc Warren (who also replaces Doctor Who's Peter Capaldi in the second season of BBC One's swashbuckling adventure *The Musketeers*) and Alice Englert.

It seems that the BBC's historic commercial rival ITV hasn't entirely abandoned genre television. Early 2015 is expected to see the arrival of *Thunderbirds Are Go!* ITV's live-action/CGI reboot of the classic 1960s Gerry Anderson Supermarionation puppet adventure. Voice talent will include Rosamund Pike as Lady Penelope and veteran actor David Graham reprising the voice of her chauffeur Parker, a role he played in the original series. Despite the fact that the series has been made with no involvement from the estate of Gerry Anderson (in the form of his son Jamie Anderson, who is now curating his father's legacy and generating new product under the name of Anderson Entertainment) Images released recently suggest that Weta Workshop have stayed true to the spirit of the original show and its iconography in recreating the Thunderbird fleet for a new century.

It also appeared that ITV, having dipped their toe in the murky waters of Saturday evening family fantasy entertainment with the moderately-successful *Primeval* and the... er... less successful *Demons* following the smash-hit resurrection of *Doctor Who*, may be trying again with a couple of new shows announced as being 'close to commission' back in April this year (although neither of them seem hugely-appropriate for a Saturday evening slot). *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* is rumoured to be written by Charlie (Fast Show) Higson, with Tim Haines (Walking with Dinosaurs) working on a TV version of the 'Old English' poem telling of the exploits of the heroic Beowulf and his battles with the grotesque Grendel.

Plenty of fuel for the fantasy fire coming up over the next twelve months and while we can't hope to cover every new series, mini-series and 'event' series in any great detail, hopefully we've given you a few pointers as to which shows to watch out for and which to avoid in the next TV year. Here's to 2015/16?





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# IN THESE OLD WOODS

by Iain Robertson

*To celebrate the Blu-ray release of David Lynch and Mark Frost's iconic, genre-bending '90s classic (hell, like we even need a reason), we take a trip back to TWIN PEAKS with a countdown of its ten most wonderfully weird moments...*

It's one of the biggest, not to mention best cult TV shows of all time, and a firm favourite here at STARBURST HQ. Starting as an investigation into the murder of small town prom queen Laura Palmer, *Twin Peaks* quickly evolved into a delicious mix of thriller, horror, comedy, sci-fi, soap opera and the downright weird. It also had one of the most deliciously eclectic cast of characters ever assembled, headed by the world's most cheerful FBI Agent, Dale Cooper (Kyle MacLachlan). The new Blu-ray box set, besides lovingly restoring the series, includes the prequel movie, *Fire Walk With Me*, a host of brand new David Lynch-supervised extras and, most tantalisingly, nearly two hours of never before seen deleted scenes from both the series and movie. So, to mark the return of one of our favourite shows, here's our list of ten moments that left us scratching our collective heads. Please note that it includes MAJOR SPOILERS for both the series and movie, including the identity (identities?) of Laura's killer, but as it's 25 years old, we figure we're allowed. Let's rock...



10

## WHAT HAPPENED TO JOSIE?

Josie Packard was, to be honest, one of *Twin Peaks'* less interesting inhabitants. As played by Joan Chen, the successful businesswoman/grieving widow/Sheriff's love interest/murderess/former prostitute would have been a standout in any other show. But in *Twin Peaks*, she was one of the town's more conventional soap-opera-style characters. That is, until her frankly bonkers death scene. After a night of passion with her husband's former business partner Thomas Eckhardt (with whom she conspired to murder her husband), Josie kills him. Then, just as Cooper and Sheriff Truman (Michael Ontkean) burst into the room, she drops dead, seemingly of fright. And then it gets weird. Demonic killer Bob pops up shouting, "What happened to Josie," the mysterious backwards talking dwarf (or The Man From Another Place to give the entity his correct title) appears, dances on the bed, and then Josie's spirit seems to get trapped in the wooden door knob of the bedside cabinet. Oh well, if you're gonna go, go in style.





## THE LLAMA

It's a small throwaway moment, but one which captures the spirit of the show so perfectly it just had to make the list. When Cooper and Truman visit a local vet as part of their investigation, they find the waiting room taken up not by the usual dogs or cats, but by a fully grown llama. The moment epitomises the show – it's the kind of thing that could happen in the real world, but just doesn't. The same goes for most of the town's residents, or the various eccentric groups of guests who populate the background of its hotel, *The Great Northern*. Barring the supernatural elements, theoretically most things in the series are plausible, but *Twin Peaks* is the only place where they actually occur! The scene's highlight? That'll be when the llama walks between the two actors mid-conversation, exchanges a stare with Cooper, then the two actors continue, both without missing a beat, and somehow manage to keep a straight face.



## LAURA'S DEATH

The unfairly maligned prequel film *Fire Walk With Me* upped the weirdness ante considerably, with the movie's climax – Laura Palmer's death – proving a suitably nightmarish Lynch masterpiece. Following a rather unpleasant party with Leo, Jacques and Waldo the Myna Bird, Laura and fellow bad girl Ronette Pulaski (in no way named after a well-known director) are abducted by Bob/Leland and taken to an abandoned train car, hotly pursued by one-armed man Philip Gerard (in no way a reference to *The Fugitive*). What follows is a nightmarish sequence, with the killer constantly flitting between Laura's father Leland and Bob, his attempted possession of Laura, a magic ring and her eventual, brutal death. The following sequence, where Bob/Leland returns to the Black Lodge is equally bizarre, and concludes with an angel visiting Laura in the Red Room, and her bursting into tears of joy; death finally giving her the happiness she was denied in life.



## COOPER'S VISITORS

The season one cliffhanger saw an unseen assailant (Josie Packard as it turns out) gun down Agent Cooper in his hotel room. Fortunately for the eternally chirpy FBI agent, Josie had an almost Stormtrooper-like sense of accuracy, and despite shooting him three times at point blank range, none of the bullets did enough damage to put an end to Cooper's exploits. Season two opens with a wounded Cooper being found by the world's most decrepit waiter, who's delivering his night-time cup of warm milk. Ignoring Cooper's requests for a doctor, the waiter fails to realise anything out of the ordinary is happening, and the two of them proceed to have a nice chat, with Cooper even giving the waiter a somewhat generous (given the circumstances) tip. And then it gets odd. A giant appears to Cooper in a vision, and offers him some helpful clues such as, "There's a man in smiling bag," "Without chemicals he points," "Leo locked inside a hungry horse," as well as the immortal, "The owls are not what they seem." He then tells Cooper he requires medical attention before handily buggering off without so much as dialling 911.





## HOW'S ANNIE?

Ok, *Twin Peaks* did weird, but the series' final scene is surreal, not to mention heart-breaking enough, to more than merit a place on this list. After rescuing his girlfriend Annie Blackburn (Heather Graham) from the clutches of the insane Windom Earle and the Black Lodge, Cooper wakes in his hotel room, where he's been watched over by Sheriff Truman and Doc Hayward. After asking after Annie's well-being, Cooper announces, naturally, that he needs to brush his teeth. He heads into the bathroom, squeezes toothpaste onto his brush, then empties the rest of the tube into the sink, stares into the mirror, then suddenly headbutts it. The truly shocking bit though is where we see Cooper's reflection in the shattered mirror. After spending the series hunting and fighting murderous demon Bob, we see the killer's reflection staring back at Cooper. The possessed, bleeding FBI agent stares at the camera, repeatedly asks "How's Annie?", before breaking into a laugh and we cut to the end credits. It's one of the most shocking, memorable and brilliant endings to any show ever, and has left fans desperate to find out what happens to their hero for a quarter of a century.



## THE LOG LADY

Ok, so she's a character, not a moment, but it's impossible to compile a *Twin Peaks* top ten without including Catherine E. Coulson's brilliantly bonkers Log Lady. Lynch first pictured Coulson holding a log when she worked on his 1977 debut movie, *Eraserhead*, and when *Twin Peaks* came along he created the role especially for her. It was worth the wait. In a town full of gloriously bizarre locals it takes a lot to stand out, but the Log Lady takes the weirdness to another level. Margaret, to give her her correct name, has a habit of carrying around a log, which may or may not be possessed with the spirit of her dead husband – a lumberjack who died in a fire on their wedding night. Oh, and naturally the log imparts various pearls of wisdom, which Margaret translates with varying degrees of accuracy. And this being *Twin Peaks*, the log was a key witness to the events leading up to Laura's murder, meaning we're treated to the delicious sight of Cooper questioning an inanimate piece of wood. When the series went into syndication, Lynch filmed introductions from the Log Lady for each episode, in which offers her thoughts on subjects as diverse as logs, death masks, dogs, hearts, pie, and other things that had little or nothing to do with the series.



## GROUND CONTROL TO DAVID LYNCH

*Fire Walk With Me*'s most surreal moment came courtesy of this cameo from the Thin White Duke. In one of Cooper's few scenes in the film, he informs his boss Gordon Cole (brilliantly played by Lynch himself) that he's worried about today because of a dream he had. After a bit of Cooper anxiously pacing corridors, the CCTV starts going weird, the lift doors open and out slurs long lost FBI agent Phillip Jeffries, played by none other than David Bowie. After ranting that he's "not going to talk about Judy," (and no, we don't know who she is either), he offers some clues about Cooper's eventual fate (see number 6). Jeffries then starts rambling about having "attended one of their meetings," accompanied by surreal footage of some of the Black Lodge's inhabitants, including Bob, The Man From Another Place, Mrs Chalfont and her grandson. He then starts screaming and disappears as mysteriously as he arrived. *The Missing Pieces* on the new Blu-ray set expands his role, offering a more detailed explanation of who he is and what happened to him, but his cameo is bizarre, bonkers, and brilliant.



**3****IT IS HAPPENING AGAIN**

There's ways to reveal your killer, and then there's the David Lynch way to reveal your killer. After teasing viewers for a season and a half as to who killed Laura Palmer - and then only under network pressure, (Lynch never wanted to reveal the killer) - Bob struck again. That Bob was Laura's killer was never really in doubt. Exactly who and what Bob was though was one of the biggest TV mysteries in many a year. Laura's drugged mother, Sarah, has visions of a horse in her living room, the Log Lady warns Cooper "there are owls in the Roadhouse," Julee Cruise performs some of her weird dream pop, Cooper has a vision of the giant, who proclaims, "It is happening again," and then we cut to the Palmer house. Laura's grieving father, Leland, stares into the mirror, and we see killer Bob staring back at him. Laura's cousin, Madie (played, like Laura, by Sheryl Lee) walks in at the wrong time, and becomes the demonic killer's latest victim, in a scene that's still shockingly violent. After teasing us with multiple suspects for half of the show's run - and expertly duping us into suspecting slimy local businessman Ben Horne - the reveal that Laura had been raped and killed by her own father, formerly one of the show's most sympathetic characters, is utterly devastating.

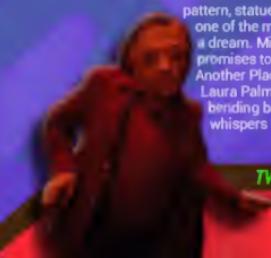
**2****CRIME SOLVING - TIBET STYLE!**

Most of the weirder moments in the show came courtesy of the darker, nightmarish sequences, but this scene is a pure delight, and one of the series' most inspired moments of demented genius. Rather than rely on normal methods of detection, Agent Cooper prefers to use a traditional Tibetan technique involving "mind/body coordination operating hand in hand with the deepest level of intuition," which, naturally for Cooper, came to him into a dream. This essentially equates to him lecturing his colleagues on the recent history of Tibet, Deputy Hawk wearing oven gloves, copious amounts of coffee and doughnuts, and Cooper throwing rocks at a bottle whilst the names of suspects are read out. It's frankly bonkers, and one of the most entertaining moments in the show. Considering this little experiment incorrectly results in the finger of blame being pointed at local bad boy Leo Johnson, its usefulness in crime solving is, unfortunately, limited.

**1****COOPER'S DREAM**

What else could be number one? Nobody captures dream logic like David Lynch, and he's never done it better than this early sequence. It upped the weirdness ante, offered viewers several tantalising, cryptic clues, and best of all, introduced us to The Red Room. One of the manifestations of the otherworldly Black Lodge, its billowing red curtains, migraine inducing zig-zag floor pattern, statues, weird shadows, minimalist furniture, and a dancing, backwards-talking dwarf all go together to form one of the most unforgettable images in television history. Agent Cooper goes to bed one night, and has one hell of a dream. Mike (the spirit inhabiting the one-armed man) delivers the fan-favourite "Fire Walk With Me" poem, Bob promises to kill again, and then all of a sudden it's 25 years later. Cooper's in The Red Room with The Man From Another Place and a woman, who the diminutive spirit claims is his cousin, who bears an uncanny resemblance to Laura Palmer. After assorted cryptic, backwards-spoken utterances from the pair about chewing gum and arms bending back, The Man From Another Place busts out some funky dance moves, whilst his cousin/Laura hardly whispers the name of the killer in Cooper's ear. And yes, he does forget it when he wakes up.

**TWIN PEAKS: THE ENTIRE MYSTERY** is available now on Blu-ray.



# BRIEF ENCOUNTERS

by Paul Mount

**STARBURST** travels to South London to visit the set and speak to some of the cast and crew of *THE SEVENTEENTH KIND*, an intriguing new British sci-fi short from LOOSE CANNON FILMS and HYDRA FILMS RKM which brings together a motley and impressive cast in a tale of a very unusual close encounter...



**A**s far as eclectic - some might say eccentric - casts go, *The Seventeenth Kind's* is right up there with the best of them. Across two intensive weeks in January British TV/film legend Brian Blessed, genre favourite Tony Curran, former Doctor Who Sylvester McCoy, cult *Withnail and I* star Ralph Brown, larger-than-life TV/film/stage force of nature Miriam Margolyes and former tabloid model Lucy Pinder assembled at SV Studios in South London to bring to life a very singular close encounter with a very strange alien life-form.

*The Seventeenth Kind* is based on a popular short story by Michael Marshall Smith in which a seedy, down-at-heels TV presenter for the Shop-O-Vision TV shopping channel enters into an unearthly dialogue with a mysterious and powerful alien entity voiced by... well, you can probably guess from the cast list. As **STARBURST** visits the set towards the end of the film's production schedule, Tony Curran (playing cheesy TV host James Richard) and Lucy Pinder (his shapely, if largely mute, assistant/co-presenter Melissa) are filming a series of inserts demonstrating some of the Shopping Channel's less salubrious products. The film's director and co-writer Andy Collier explains the idea behind *The Seventeenth Kind*, "It's about a washed-up wannabe actor who finds some reflection of the fame he craves as the successful front man of a television shopping channel. Even this is fleeting and his life goes into freefall at the start of the story after he makes some bad choices. Then some very unusual guests turn up for his show one night and things take a step into the Twilight Zone..."

Producer Sean Knopp explains how it was Andy Collier's enthusiasm for the original story which brought the project to the attention of Loose Cannon. "Andy brought the short story to our attention,



convinced that it would not only make a good stand-alone sci-fi short but that it even had the potential to be developed into a series. It's a fantastically witty and original short story but I didn't immediately see the cinematic potential due to its contained nature and being written in the third person. However, Andy is a passionate guy and soon persuaded me that an adaptation could and would be extremely filmic. After reading Andy and co-writer/producer Tor Mian's first draft, I was convinced and the project was quickly greenlit."

Tony Curran, currently starring in the second season of Syfy's *Defiance* and remembered for his role as Vincent Van Gogh in the 2010 Doctor Who episode 'Vincent and the Doctor', was attracted to *The Seventeenth Kind* by the quality of the script. "I thought the script was quite comedic when I read it," he says.

"I thought it was well put together like a good piece of meat - tasty-looking and with not too much fat around the edges! Jimmy Richards is a young man who's got aspirations in life and he wants to be a performer, an actor. It doesn't work out for him and he eventually gets this gig on a Shopping Channel, selling stuff on TV that no-one really wants. But he's the best at it, he's very charismatic and he's got his own way of selling things and he becomes quite a success. Then things start to get a little odd when a caller phones in who's from another planetary system! The film gets very weird, it takes a sort of left turn and I find out that some of the other cast members aren't quite what they seem!"

And it's the cast of *The Seventeenth Kind* that really raises an eyebrow. "From the outset we all wanted to aim as high as possible and try to fill the film

with 'genre royalty,'" says Sean. "While Tony Curran is known for his wide and varied career, Andy Collier is possibly the world's biggest *13th Warrior* fan so you can imagine how delighted he was when Tony responded to the script and agreed to do it - so delighted, in fact, that when Tony unfortunately seriously injured his leg before shooting there was never a question of looking for a replacement, we'd simply find a way of shooting around it. When we were initially 'daydreaming casting' Sylvester, Brian, Ralph and Miriam were always at the top of the list but we didn't actually anticipate getting them. We're just extremely fortunate that they all responded positively to the script."

"We took a gamble and cast the film in December, one month before the shoot," adds Andy. "The idea was that people know that a big feature isn't going to



land on their agent's desk at such short notice so they might consider smaller projects which would otherwise be off their radar. This turned into a feat of unplanned brinkmanship as we still hadn't cast the lead five days before the shoot but we got there in the end! Luckily all of the actors we wanted loved the script! Due to Tony's travel constraints we didn't get to rehearse the main cast until the Friday before we started shooting on Monday but by the end of the afternoon the performances were already looking great. Tony and Ralph are, of course great actors, Sylvester is a legend and Lucy, despite being less experienced, at least in dramatic roles, is a natural and they all work great together on screen."

STARBURST's visit coincides with Miriam Margolyes' first day on set. Miriam explained that whilst she liked the script of *The Seventeenth Kind*, she's no fan of the genre. "I hate science fiction, I don't like it at all," she told us. "I think it's for blokes, not girls. In this I'm the 'voice of the public', the person who calls in so I don't need much in the way of costume and make-up except a tighter bra! I thought the script was wonderful and I love doing slightly wacky things that we don't usually get offered so I thought it was a nice opportunity. I enjoy doing things which are an expression of hope and youth and all the things which, at my age, I don't see much of!"

Fans of Michael Marshall Smith's short story might be a little surprised by the film's extended cast as the story itself is pretty much a one-man show. Inevitably, the scope of the script had to broaden

out of necessity. "That was the biggest challenge, staying true to the original but adapting it for the screen," admits Andy Collier. "Michael's story is great - original, surprising, darkly humorous - but it's very much a stream-of-consciousness monologue from James, the rather self-absorbed main character. That wouldn't work at all in a film so we had a lot of work to do and I hope we figured it out in the end. Michael was of course involved and his first words were 'Interesting choice...' which I still presume was a sideways comment about how difficult he thought it would be to pull off a successful adaptation. When we sent him draft twenty-eight - or whatever version we'd reached by the time we were happy to release it - he became a believer!"

But shooting an ambitious science fiction short in a two-week timescale and with a tiny budget comes with its own difficulties. "We had to plan everything to a fanatical level of detail," said Andy. "We story boarded every single shot as we didn't have time to get the usual levels of coverage of every scene. Luckily, there are enough layers of action going on simultaneously that even with limited coverage of each, the edit looks very natural and we couldn't be more pleased with it. The biggest challenge was the scene from Michael's story where the aliens freeze time for everybody on the planet outside the TV studio. Given that the rest of the film is pretty much shot inside one location, we wanted to break up the visuals and make the whole thing seem bigger by getting some of the most iconic sights in London in there, frozen in time. It's used

very sparingly, I didn't want to labour the special effects but it looks great."

The *Seventeenth Kind* presents itself as a unique, one-off story with a very definitive beginning, middle and end. But in the world of science fiction, stories never really end and everyone involved seems keen to develop the movie should the opportunity come along. "Our long-term goal for the project is potentially developing a TV series," said Sean Knapp. "Although I'm pleased to say that the story has an extremely satisfying conclusion, there is certainly a lot of scope to broaden the world... or rather, broaden the Universe!" Tony Curran's keen to come back for more should the call come. "Whenever you create a character and have fun with it and people enjoy it, you'd be foolish to say 'no' to doing more of it. It's been a real joy, we've all had a good time."

Regardless of whether *The Seventeenth Kind* remains a one-off or not, Andy Collier at least is satisfied that he's achieved what he set out to do in bringing Michael Marshall Smith's quirky and cautionary tale to the screen. "There's a thread of satire in Michael's original story and we definitely elaborate on that social commentary element in the film. But mostly it's a film by sci-fi fans for sci-fi fans, made for the love of the genre and we hope people will watch it with big smiles on their faces."

THE SEVENTEENTH KIND will be appearing at festivals from Autumn onwards, before becoming available on DVD, Blu-ray and VOD early 2015. Visit [www.17kind.com](http://www.17kind.com) for more information.





## FREEZING TIME

One of the visual highlights of *THE SEVENTEENTH KIND* is the climactic sequence where the alien entity 'freezes time' and brings the entire world to a standstill. The film's Director of Photography, Lorenzo Levini, explains how the sequences were created with the help of a unique and impressive array of delicately rigged cameras...

"We wanted three frozen time shots, around four or five seconds each because in the story time freezes and to really sell that, rather than just say 'time has frozen' and maybe show a frozen clock we wanted to go outside, show it in the context of London and show that time is actually frozen. We always wanted to do it with a 'bullet time' rig but when we actually went out to the companies who do this professionally we found them to be way too expensive so we looked at various options as to how you create a frozen time-style shot. We looked at super-high-speed cameras - we looked at the Phantom (high speed camera), we looked at MoCo (Motion Control) and we looked at CGI and blue screen techniques but ultimately I just wanted to try doing it myself because I thought it'd be loads of fun and I enjoy the challenge of coming up with new stuff. So I figured out how to do my own bullet-time/frozen-time rig. We have 34 cameras which have to fire at exactly the same time and they have to be exactly the same camera with the same lens. Once you've done that you have to put it into post production to interpolate the frames in between to create enough screen time. So we had 34 cameras which would only be enough for a second or ten frames which is no good so you have to create three or four virtual cameras in between. For that to work they've got to be very well aligned so we spoke to our post guys, they ran some tests, they told us what was possible in terms of grain and motion blur and alignment accuracy. I also managed to get in touch with Mark Weingartner who did it on *The Matrix* and he gave me some tips and with all that info we hired the kit and built the rig. My friend from UCL (University College London) built the trigger which just electrically-isolates the remote shutter for each camera and just wires them all together. It's nothing too complicated. At the London Eye we did two tourists jumping up in the air and a pass of the whole scene, a pass of the background and a pass of each subject individually so the post guys can take elements and then rebuild it if there's any problems. At Tower Bridge we did a windswept kiss between two lovers and finally at the studio we did a BMX biker doing a wheelie in front of the Shop-O-Vision Studios where the story is set."



CAROLINE PREECE

# The Girl From

PLANET  
H



With every big, cultural hit, we have to expect a lot of similar projects being put into development and, with the mega success story that is *The Hunger Games* not threatening to slow down any time soon, we should have been expecting something like *The 100* to arrive at some point. Just as *Twilight* spawned shows like *The Vampire Diaries* and *True Blood* before it, *The 100* isn't tied to its similar cinematic counterpart in any real way other than perceived marketability, but it's plausible to think that it probably wouldn't exist without the prevalence of Katniss Everdeen and her grim account of adolescence.

The tale of a teenager sent into unknown territory to battle it out with her peers for survival sounds familiar for a reason, and, even if the show is based on a completely different property, it's hard not to notice the similarities between the two. It's official – vampires and werewolves are out and post-apocalyptic sci-fi is in when it comes to movies and television shows aimed at a young audience, and it's no accident that *The 100*'s protagonist is also a resilient teenage girl with plenty of

attitude and an axe to grind. Clarke has been written in the same vein as Katniss, and that's not a bad thing.

What is a little more questionable is the prevalence of teenage romance in all of these stories, carried over from the *Twilight* juggernaut and sadly one of the first things showrunners and directors are asked to think about when constructing the next big hit. Series airing on US network, The CW, have become known for this preoccupation with love triangles and romantic tension, with plenty of people using it as a way to dismiss the network's output entirely, and *The 100* is unfortunately cut from the same cloth. Despite its sci-fi roots and interesting perspective on a society facing extinction, we're still focusing on teenagers falling in love.

The show is based on a book by Kass Morgan, and chronicles the adventures of a hundred young offenders who are sent down to Earth to test its habitability ahead of a return from the rest of the human race. On the Ark, a space station housing the survivors of a nuclear war, corruption and distrust thrive and the hundred on

the ground must decide whether to make contact or keep the Earth for themselves. It's equal parts *Lost*, *Lord of the Flies* and *Battlestar Galactica*, and has been a big hit for a network looking to capitalise on their newfound reputation for producing more adult shows like *Arrow*.

Is it a prerequisite that teenage girls – to which these properties are almost entirely marketed to – won't watch things without the perpetual love triangle, or is that just a false assumption of the studios? Two new series premiered mid-season on the same network – *The 100* and *Star-Crossed* – and both had very different ideas about how to distribute time and energy. While it could be argued that the first gave pretty equal focus to both sides, *Star-Crossed* felt like a relic from another decade. A sci-fi romance in much the same vein as *Roswell*, it quickly found that it couldn't sustain interest on a love triangle alone, and has now been cancelled.

Love triangles, while still thought of as franchise gold, could actually be said to have done more harm than good in recent years. Shows like *Vampire Diaries*, which once rose above assumptions and became confident, exciting fantasy dramas, have put too much stock in their central concept and invested too heavily in the romance aspect even after five seasons. This season has seen the show shed viewers and audience respect largely because of its treatment of the love story as separate to the main narrative of the show (or, in many cases, treated as the narrative by itself), and it's a shadow of its former self.

Compare this to something like *Arrow*, which has been a breakout hit, *Supernatural* or *The Originals*, which all manage to balance out their soapy elements with good, well-written character development and those genre aspects a wider audience



THE 100

# The 100 – A Great Show Buried Beneath Genre Expectations



STAR-CROSSED

are tuning in to see. One difference, of course, is that these three shows have older male protagonists, despite the network's reputation for only portraying the trials of teenage girls, and it's hard not to assume that this is a factor. Why is it still the assumption that a show can't hold the attention of a young, female audience without romantic drama as the main focus?

Often, as in *The Hunger Games*, it's just a background feature that doesn't really drive the story anywhere – present for those who like to watch these soap opera shenanigans alongside sci-fi and fantasy adventures – but there are countless examples in which it's a hindrance, rather than a help. In *The 100*, for example, the central love triangle is almost always a distraction from what's going on elsewhere; sometimes comically shoehorned into a scene where the stakes are otherwise life and death. It feels like network notes, rather than something organically produced in the writer's room.

There are some shows that do it very well, such as MTV's *Teen Wolf* which used its central romance in order to add to the protagonist's journey, rather than as a way to draw in viewers. The show even went so far as to permanently split Scott and Alison up in order to comment on the transitory nature of young love, and it feels as though more of these teen dramas should have the guts to do the same or similar. This sub-genre is so prevalent because it has the power to use genre elements to portray issues of adolescence – of which romance is a big part – but these forced love stories

feel increasingly like a marketing ploy.

Would *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* have been such a big, generation-defining show had it done the same thing? Considered one of the best of its kind, *Buffy* was a rare beast in that the ups and downs of its relationships always came secondary to what those relationships did to each character, and what they said about growing up. It's sad to think that, today, it might be hard for a show to split up a couple like Buffy and Angel, whether that's for the season two Angelus arc or the subsequent spin-off, or for the Buffy/Spike relationship to exist outside of the implied, off-screen love triangle.

All television shows have an element of romance, as they should, but it seems that those shows aimed at a young, predominantly female audience are pressured to have those elements become more prevalent even if they jar with the rest of what's going on. *The 100*, compared to *Lost*, is much more focused on who each of the kids on the ground are sleeping with or falling for, and seems only to be the case because of their target audience. The frustrations with *The Vampire Diaries* since it abandoned all pretence that it wasn't just a vampire soap opera and the great reaction its spin-off, *The Originals*, has gotten prove that audiences can be just as interested without the promise of a fraught shipper war to draw them in.

The reason this is such a problem is that *The 100* actually has the potential to be a very good show, and has been very well received across a range of demographics.

It's the sort of unabashed sci-fi show we've all been clamouring for, differing from the most obvious point of reference – *The Hunger Games* – in significant ways and so far proving that it's willing to take risks and shock its audience. It might be described as a hit by its network, but the problem remains that The CW is a place known for its dedication to teenage angst and pointless, ever-rotating love triangles. People have already dismissed it because of where it lives, and that's a shame.

When something like *The Hunger Games* reaches an audience it arguably never intended to, the strangeness of this preoccupation becomes even more apparent. Reviews of *Catching Fire* went out of their way to praise Jennifer Lawrence, her performance and the character of Katniss herself, but many of them were also bemused by the marketing's focus on her relationships with Peeta and Gale as if it mattered much more than it actually did when watching the film. We're all asked what 'team' we're on for, but for a large section of the film's audience, it all just feels like a distraction to all of the great things about the series.

Instead of talking down to its audience and lading on love stories that distract from everything else, shouldn't advertising for shows like *The 100* instead have the confidence to celebrate the smart storytelling and characters? We know deep down that love triangles are always going to be a part of the genre, but that doesn't mean it's all these shows have to offer. +



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## INDEPENDENTS DAY

by Martin Unsworth

# HOOTS MON

**In the first of our regular look at independent filmmakers, we catch up with Scottish director LAWRIE BREWSTER, whose feature *LORD OF TEARS* is quickly gaining cult status...**



**STARBURST:** What set you on the path to being a filmmaker, and what experience did you have before making *Lord of Tears*?

Lawrie Brewster: Well, I was inspired to become a filmmaker when I was watching a late night Channel Four screening of the Akira Kurosawa film *Red Beard*, strangely enough! I already had a love of horror and fantasy as a child, watching *Godzilla* and black & white monster films. But it was *Red Beard* that made me feel impassioned to say something with my work, or art. If that sounds pretentious, it certainly is not because I assume my own film work is art, but that is at least the goal I seek to achieve in my attempts to produce cerebral and artistic horror films.

*Red Beard*, and other wonderful, intellectual, or crazy artistic films such as Ken Russell's *The Devils*, or *The Innocents*, for example, showed how a genre traditionally associated with exploitation or tackiness could have a sub-section that is elevated.

It's been seen before in films such as *The Exorcist* or *The Shining*, but far less in the independent sphere. So those were inspirations. To try to fulfil them, I first attended Acting College - but was terrible, I managed to bring the spirit of *Puss in Boots* to *Macbeth* - and then moved onto TV and Production at college, and eventually Film at Napier University.

I would stress though, that my greatest learning experiences came from producing my own films around my studies. Likewise, for any readers interested in film, I cannot recommend enough that one need only grab a camera and practice, to learn what you need, at least technically speaking.

In other experience, I produced dozens of corporate videos, promotions and tourist videos - yay! - while all the time saving for gear, and my own creative projects, culminating with *Lord of Tears*.

How, as an indie artist, did you go about approaching established artists like David Schofield to work on the film? That must have been daunting. The most daunting prospect was really how to contact agents, and the costs that might be associated with hiring talent. As an independent filmmaker,



you often represent the least-desired type of client, and will face the greatest amount of 'qualification' from agents, i.e. testing how capable you really are and if you have any kind of budget, or if you will produce something that might embarrass their client and so forth. I had some achievements already with short films, showcasing my work at Sundance and SXSW, so I was fortunate in this respect. David Schofield was an actor we were excited by because we felt he had a wonderfully menacing voice and a great sense of presence. We also felt that his résumé reflected the type of film we were producing, more than, say, an actor from a beloved camp b-movie might. This classical theatrical actor would bring gravitas to our work. This is something David achieved for us! When we worked with him, he was charming and lovely, we exchanged stories and jokes, and he was incredible, giving us 110%. It was cool to see David performing in the voice-recording booth, acting out our Owlman - he was standing, and gesturing wildly. It was mesmerising!

You had almost finished the film by the

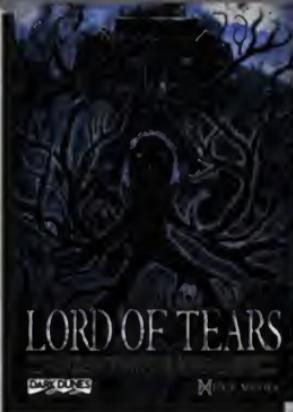
time you launched on Kickstarter; did you have any back-up plans should the campaign not succeed, or would it have just taken longer?

Kickstarter was instrumental in completing our film, without it we would have really struggled, as we had already spent everything we could muster trying to get *Lord of Tears* finished. However, we would have finished it eventually, but the huge difference Kickstarter made was to allow us to finish it to the best standard we could manage, and to release it for our Kickstarter backers, and eventual customers, in a product form that was truly something special. Our campaign was based on the idea of selling our film - as products - utilising the page almost like a pre-order site. Of course, it went to our film but it allowed folks to feel they were getting good value for money, beyond just helping us to get the film made.

During the campaign, you gained another producer with Sultan Saeed Al Darmaki coming onboard. He's a vocal supporter of indie horror, has he been very hands-on since the release?

Sultan Saeed Al Darmaki is a great patron of the horror arts and really helped us to get *Lord of Tears* out there after our successful Kickstarter. So great was his help and contribution to us that his own incredible monster movie company, Dark Dunes Productions, is also listed as a co-production company for *Lord of Tears*. He has been hands-on and we look forward to working with him again where possible! He is a great guy, and he's actually just directed his own debut feature called *Kids vs. Monsters*, starring Malcolm McDowell!!

You struck gold with the Owlman character - it really captured the imagination of everyone checking the Kickstarter out - were you ever worried it may have given the wrong impression of the type of film it actually is? At first I wasn't so concerned because folks experienced the Owlman through the context of our Kickstarter and our social media Facebook page etc. It was very personal - which is how we try to maintain our engagement with fans and audiences of *Lord of Tears*. However, once the Owlman became a viral



sensation - with the Owlman hospital prank - and grew as an online pop cultural phenomenon, oft compared to Slender Man, more people would come to our film without researching what it was about, or even reading reviews. Because our film is a very British style of supernatural horror, almost whimsical and arty, I worried that some fans might expect a stylish slasher/gory macabre film.

This concern was proven at times, when I might encounter a negative comment here or there; confusing the vintage style of our film and theatrics for being a poorly acted, unexciting slasher-go figure. Many fans in the horror genre are actually very conservative about their tastes, and make assumptions about your film, or any film, in the genre. Like if it's not the precise form of entertainment they expect, then there must be something wrong with it. Most of our praise has come from folks who enjoy supernatural horror, but also from many who would not have considered themselves fans of horror.

You touched on the prank video there, the mainstream media even picked up

on it; when did the idea for that come and has that opened doors for you in any way?

Well my perspective was that our creature, or horror entities that we create for our film, are larger than life; certainly larger than any single film. So we love breathing life into them beyond the film - be it in song, stories or other media. The prank video was, for us, a theatre performance, albeit with some unwitting actors. This is why our 'pranks' are different to the canned laughter stuff you see online. We're creating terrifying supernatural-styled experiences... a glimpse into the possibilities that might exist in other universes or dimensions. The video's success helped us to sell more copies of *Lord of Tears*, and introduce more folks to our nightmare creation, with many now hanging out as our welcome guests at our Facebook page.

So, were they 100% genuine, unsuspecting, people in the video? Oh absolutely - we like to engineer these encounters with a degree of sophistication, which is why we can't

produce a lot of them, as they're very time consuming.

We imagine there was a lot of waiting around for people to wander in... Yeah, but we had a scout, so it meant we didn't have to spend ages waiting in position. We chose locations where we could spot likely visitors well in advance of them reaching it.

So if you were offered big bucks would you allow a studio to come in and take the character in a different direction - maybe make it more monster than myth - or would you feel like that would be doing it a disservice? Ooooh, well that is a tantalising prospect. I think it really depends on the vision they would have, and the rights that we might reserve to continue developing our direction for the Owlman. I think he's a broad enough entity to be explored in various directions, but we certainly couldn't see him as a slasher villain, for example - he'd have dark servants or manipulated peons for that I think. If the Owlman continues to grow then it is entirely



DAVID SCHOFIELD



possible that a studio might want to produce a film with him - who knows - we'll have to wait and see!

We can't imagine him getting his talons dirty! Yet like you say, it's an interesting enough concept - so something like comic books, novels, even audio book/ plays would be options?

In the digital book with our Collectors' Edition, we have two novellas set with the Owlman. Certainly books, comics and other materials are going to happen. We're keen to see if there are artists that have bold ideas about the Owlman, that get what we're trying to achieve and that might work with us to expand it, but yep, lots of options!

**So what's happening now with the film, will it be going to VOD, commercial release and TV?**

Well, right now we're working on a VOD release, although you can watch it on Distriify and Vimeo On Demand right now, outside the UK. 88 Films, the UK distributor, will be releasing *Lord of Tears* later this year on DVD and VOD. We'll also be releasing an exciting new Special Edition version, a 3-disc DVD-sized Digipak, with 8 panels, all new artwork and extras. As for TV, we might have something to report in coming months.

**Finally, Do you have anything else in the pipeline you can tell us about?**

We're developing more horror fantasy films, and we're eager for folks who are excited at the idea of an indie company producing and distributing films to get involved, to join our Facebook page, and share the journey with us. A lot of what we're doing is against the present commercial mainstream.

+++

You can find out more about Lawrie and *LORD OF TEARS* by heading to [lordoftears.com](http://lordoftears.com) and finding the film on Facebook.

If you are a filmmaker or have a production company and would like to be considered for a future *INDEPENDENTS DAY* instalment, drop us an email:  
[martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com](mailto:martin.unsworth@starburstmagazine.com)



EUAN DOUGLAS



CAST and CREW



SARAH DALY



## REVIEW:

### LORD OF TEARS

**DIRECTOR: LAWRIE BREWSTER /**

**SCREENPLAY: SARAH DALY / STARRING:**  
**DAVID SCHOFIELD, ALEXANDRA HULME,**  
**EUAN DOUGLAS, JAMIE GORDON**

Schoolteacher James (Douglas) inherits his old family estate after the death of his mother; not only her humble home, but also the mansion he lived in as a child. A letter reveals that he suffered a breakdown while living there, and was moved away to recuperate. James has no recollection of this, so he goes there hoping to make sense of it all. While there, recurring nightmares begin to consume him, and he sees the figure of an Owlman, whom he apparently became obsessed with as a child. Staying nearby is Evie (Hulme), an American who befriends James and attempts to look after him during his less lucid moments. As he delves deeper into his past, he discovers some secrets are best left buried.

The initial selling point for the film, the creepy enigmatic Owlman, dressed in a dinner suit but sporting an owl's head and long talons, may lead viewers into thinking this is a monster movie. Instead, it's an engaging, deeply unsettling ghost story. With its roots in the style of *The Innocents* (1961) and the folk-horror British films of the early '70s, as well as Japanese horror such as *Ringu* (1998), *Lord of Tears* manages to combine haunting imagery with a Lovecraftian mythology that is clearly well researched and based upon existing folklore. Brewster's confident direction allows the film to develop naturally. It's a brave move, which ultimately pays off. The dulcet tones of Schofield provide the eloquent voice of the Owlman, a character that will haunt viewers for years to come.

The initial Blu-ray/DVD combo release is available as a limited edition CD-sized Digipak, packed with bonus features, a separate soundtrack CD (co-composed by writer Daly, music that complements the remote setting perfectly) and booklet. It's beautifully finished off by being wrapped in black tissue paper and sealed with an owl's feather. There is also a 440-page PDF booklet to download which covers all aspects of the film and production. A newer DVD edition will released soon (see interview), but this is worth grabbing for the stunning packaging alone.



# REVIEWS

THE LATEST BIG SCREEN GENRE RELEASES REVIEWED AND RATED



## THE EXPENDABLES 3

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: PATRICK HUGHES / SCREENPLAY: CREIGHTON ROTENBERGER, KATRIN BENEDIKT, SYLVESTER STALLONE / STARRING: SYLVESTER STALLONE, MEL GIBSON, JASON STATHAM, KELLAN LUTZ, RONDA ROUSEY, WESLEY SNIPES / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Sly Stallone's Expendables franchise returns for another outing, but this time there's some new blood thrown into the mix. After rescuing Snipes' Doc during the opening sequence, it doesn't take long before presumed-dead arms dealer Conrad Stonebanks (Gibson), one of the founders of the Expendables team, turns up and takes aim at his former brothers. With their behinds handed to them, Stallone's Barney Ross decides that his team are now on the wane, that they're past it, and that he can't put their lives in jeopardy any further. From there, Ross, seeking the assistance of Bonaparte (Kelsey Grammer), decides to bring in a team of fresh faces to help him take revenge on Stonebanks and to bring him down for good.

The Expendables 3 is exactly what you would expect it to be. There's lots of explosions, lots of weaponry, lots of familiar action heroes, lots of cheesy dialogue, and a whole host of machismo seeping through the screen. When it was

announced that this threequel was to be a 12A, many were concerned. Fear not, for the film still manages to have a tough edge to it, although some of the more gory kills of the last two movies are obviously held back here and a lot of the violence is shot with quick-cuts or off-camera actions. Still, the movie doesn't suffer for this and the action is as amped up as you would hope.

In terms of the new faces brought in, all do a surprisingly good job at injecting the team (and the franchise) with a new life and freshness. In particular, Kellan Lutz gives a cock-sure performance that impresses, UFC Champ Rousey makes for a formidable female badass, whilst Glen Powell's charismatic geek Thorn steals every scene he's in. As for the older new faces, Antonio Banderas' eccentric Galgo devours scenery in the way that Jean-Claude Van Damme did in The Expendables 2, although Banderas is one of the good guys here. It does

make you realise that there's surely more for the former Mariachi than just residing on minty chewing gum ads these days. In terms of the bad guy of the piece, Gibson similarly devours all in front of him with an intense, erratic villain who is genuinely creepy at times, none more-so than when he shares a great mid-movie back-and-forth with Stallone and his team of young pups.

This is an actioner that has a lot more going on than just bullets, brawn and blowing things up. If we're honest, some of the action scenes go on a little too long and become a tad samey, but there's enough heart and chemistry in the old and new characters to make the film enjoyable on some other impressive levels.

ANDREW POLLARD

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★★ 5

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★★ 7



## LUCY

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: LUC BESSON / STARRING: SCARLETT JOHANSSON, MORGAN FREEMAN / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 22ND

After her new boyfriend tricks her into delivering a suitcase with unknown content to a vicious Korean crime lord, Lucy (Johansson) finds herself running out of time. When things naturally go sour, she discovers that she is carrying a powerful synthetic drug in her lower abdomen. As the drug begins to enter her system, Lucy is able to access

more and more of her cerebral capacity, giving her astounding abilities that pose more questions than answers about the power of the human brain.

Johansson delivers a passable performance as the titular character, but struggles to make it memorable. Lucy herself is just too dull. She goes from crying for the film's first twenty minutes

to spending the rest of the movie staring blankly into space, an emotional range that encourages indifference towards her and pretty much eliminates any investment we may have had in the protagonist. As usual, Morgan Freeman essentially plays Morgan Freeman: an expert, specialist, or consultant in a certain field who spends the movie saying cool things in a cool voice. Freeman is one of the only Hollywood actors who is consistently typecast as himself, and it's disappointing that Besson expresses no desire to help this incredible performer expand his horizons.

Aside from Johansson herself, the film's biggest selling point is its intriguing concept. A drug that helps the user (or carrier) access ALL of their brain capacity? That's a seriously cool idea (even if it was already done in 2011's *Limitless*), but Besson tackles it with a clumsiness that becomes apparent very quickly. It's all just uninteresting, scientific jargon that makes so many vain attempts to wow an audience

that will likely come away indifferent and underwhelmed.

As it turns out, the movie's strongest aspect is its handling of Lucy's deterioration from the drug. There's an admittedly terrific scene in an airplane bathroom in which Lucy begins to shed her human appearance and disintegrate, losing the symmetry in her face in the process and almost disappearing completely before putting herself back together. It's the most captivating scene in the film, but enjoy it while it lasts, for directly following comes even more tedium.

As far as thrillers go, Lucy could have been great. Instead, it's a classic example of an amazing concept that suffers from poor execution and an almost criminal lack of inspiration or emotional resonance of any kind. Unless you're a diehard Johansson fan, it might be a good idea to skip this one.

HAYDEN MEARS

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL +++++ 4



## THE PURGE: ANARCHY

CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: JAMES DEMONACO / STARRING: FRANK GRILLO, ZACH GILFORD, KIELE SANCHEZ, CARMEN EJOGO, ZOE SOUL, MICHAEL K. WILLIAMS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

James DeMonaco's *The Purge* was arguably not a high-flier with reviewers back in 2012 but had a good premise going for it. The film was set in the not too distant future, where the annual purge has become a part of the American way of life. The purge is one 12-hour event every year where all crime (including murder) is made legal and allows citizens to cleanse their souls of darkness. The last film set up this potentially meaningful narrative but veered off more into a home invasion thriller, but for all those infuriated by that focus behind

closed doors, maybe you should see what DeMonaco offers up in this improved sequel.

The film follows three different character arcs during the twelve hours; one involving a geared-up Sergeant Leo Barnes (Grillo) on some kind of mission, a couple stranded outside when their car brakes down and a mother and daughter cast into the murderous fray. Inevitably the characters meet and form a group to survive the night. Anarchy, in spite of the flaws that populate it, is a gritty and successful sequel. DeMonaco has clearly listened to the

criticisms of the last film and has taken the action out onto the deadly streets of Los Angeles and consequently we have a movie that capitalises more on the concept. Anarchy really digs deeper into the rich/poor divide ideology, also making time for government conspiracy and the rise of vigilantism in modern culture. It is not a groundbreaking film but Anarchy at least has a brain beneath the bullet-fraying violence.

This sequel in many ways feels unashamedly like a B-movie from the '80s and Frank Grillo's silent but deadly lead is the perfect anchor for this vibe, showing that he makes a fine leading man and a thoroughly convincing tough nut. The rest of the characters may not have quite as much impact, indeed stranded couple Shane (Gilford) and Liz's (Sanchez) story is somewhat dropped come the climax - although Eva (Ejogo) and her daughter Cali (Soul) are believable victims with good hearts and Michael K. Williams is clearly having a ball as revolutionary anti-purge figurehead Carmelo. The film does not so much have villains as it does threats and its video

game-like quality may mean there is a lack of depth or logic at times but the fun is there, as is the thought.

Anarchy takes its action, production, message and scale to a grander level and the masked hooligans, armed street gangs and shady surveillance forces all make this really live up to its title. Even if the conclusion feels slightly too goodwill for all that has come before, this is still an efficient genre picture. Years back you could well imagine Stallone or Schwarzenegger in the leading role and at times the film takes on the same violent energy as films like *The Running Man* and *The Warriors* to provide an engaging, not wholly developed but effective follow-up to a neat idea. No doubt the purge will come around again next year (in fact the closing line all but confirms it, as does the film's nice profits thus far), but after this sequel, maybe that is not such a bad thing.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ++++++ 5

ACTUAL +++++++ 7



## GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: JAMES GUNN / SCREENPLAY: JAMES GUNN, NICOLE PERLMAN / STARRING: CHRIS PRATT, ZOE SALDANA, DAVID BAUTISTA, VIN DIESEL, BRADLEY COOPER, KAREN GILLAN, MICHAEL ROOKER, BENICIO DEL TORO, GLENN CLOSE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

A new movie title from Marvel Studios is always something to get worked up about. Their hit rate has been nothing short of phenomenal over the past few years, setting up and establishing familiar comic book characters in their own film series before effortlessly bringing them all together in the planet-conquering Avengers Assemble. But whilst Thor and Iron Man weren't exactly household names prior to their arrival at your local multiplex they were pretty seamlessly assimilated into the popular psyche; Guardians of the Galaxy was always likely to be a riskier movie prospect. Here, after all, is a film starring a talking raccoon, a living sentient tree, a green-skinned alien assassin and a grey-skinned tattoo-covered warrior. Guardians of the Galaxy could have been a costly disaster for Marvel, a concept too far and too high for an audience more used to the Earthbound shenanigans of Tony Stark and co.

Fortunately, Guardians of the Galaxy is, for the most part, a triumph. Director/co-scriptwriter James Gunn has clearly appreciated that his film could so easily have become a po-faced space opera, a mucky Star Wars wannabe creaking under the weight of endless men-in-cloaks banging on about extraordinary weapons and supreme power before launching into a string of soul-destroying space dogfights with bland square-jawed heroes. Instead, he's opted to dial back the drama and infuse the film with an irresistible sense of fun, his mismatched heroes bickering, wise-cracking and quickly establishing

themselves as startlingly believable people despite the extraordinariness of their appearances.

Wisely, the film eases the audience into its weirdness by introducing young Peter Quill (he listens to 10cc's 'I'm Not In Love' on his Walkman, the boy has taste) on the night his mother dies in hospital in 1988. The devastated youth rushes outside only to be abducted by a massive alien spacecraft which hoves into view. Twenty-odd years later this self-same boy is now a man; he's cocky, swaggering, and still listening to funky music on his Walkman as he investigates "abandoned planet" Morag. He calls himself Star Lord now (even if nobody else does) but deep down he's still Peter Quill; disenfranchised 20th century human adopted by alien scumbags known as the Ravagers. He soon attracts the attention of bounty hunting, genetically-engineered talking raccoon Rocket and his tree-thing companion Groot – as well as the lethal assassin Gamora who has set her sights on a super-powerful artefact which Peter just happens to have appropriated.

The film's plot tracks a well-worn path; everyone's after this magnificent MacGuffin, a devastating weapon which will give its owner supreme power. Peter's old Ravager mentor Yondu (The Walking Dead's Michael Rooker) wants it but so does Ronan (Lee Pace), a Kree warrior dispatched by the mysterious Thanos (Josh Brolin) to locate and secure the artefact. Peter finds himself fighting alongside the biggest bunch of losers in the Galaxy, and the film is at its

best when they're arguing – frequently – and taking cheap shots at one another. Gunn deftly gives each of his characters a (generally understated) backstory and is afforded the luxury of being able to punctuate the often relentless action with beautifully performed sequences where the so-called Guardians just snip and snipe at one another. They argue about each other, they argue about their situation, they argue about Peter's choice of man-bag: "It's not a purse, it's a knapsack!"

In truth, Guardians of the Galaxy stands or falls by the chemistry between its core cast and the slick wit and sense of fun inherent in Gunn's script. Everyone gets a chance to be funny, from John C. Reilly's stuffy Novacorps soldier Rhomann Day to Christopher Fairbank's mannered, well-spoken historian; there's added colour too from background characters gifted the odd one-liner or setting-up some clever sight-gag. The film only really sags when it drifts too close to the box marked 'generic space adventure'; the special effects are impressive, of course, but they run the risk now and again of dominating and overwhelming the narrative by distracting us from the characters we're warming to and having fun with. Gunn keeps the action moving at a pace that's sometimes exhausting but amidst all the explosions, crashing spaceships and exploding cityscapes there's usually room for a quick quip or laugh-out-loud gag.

Simplistic storyline aside, Guardians of the Galaxy gets more right than it does wrong. It's a big cast and not everyone's best served; Karen Gillan does good work as ruthless killer (and Gamora's sibling) Nebula but she's pretty one-dimensional and Benicio del Toro's Collector, glimpsed briefly (and slightly incongruously) at the end of Thor: The Dark World is little more than a cameo. But it's really all about the Guardians and when they're on screen together the film just buzzes. Chris Pratt, his comedy chops honed in the sublime Parks and Recreation, is a hoot as space slacker/tragic hero Peter and David Bautista brings a wonderful dryness to the literal-minded Drax the Destroyer. But the show is more often than not stolen by CGI creations Rocket (voiced by Bradley Cooper) and Groot (his three words of dialogue voiced by Vin Diesel) who get the biggest laughs and, in the end, the most emotive character arcs.

Marvel Studios can breathe a sigh of relief. Their most audacious movie investment has paid off in spades. Guardians might not be the best sci-fi blockbuster of the year – it's not as smart as Dawn of the Planet of the Apes nor, unfortunately, as knuckle-dragging as Transformers: Age of Extinction. But it's kicked off a potentially long-running new franchise in fine style; the Galaxy's in safe hands with these Guardians.

PAUL MOUNT

EXPECTED ★★★★★★★★★ 6

ACTUAL ★★★★★★★★★ 8



## HERCULES

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR: BRETT RATNER / SCREENPLAY: RYAN J. CONDAL, EVAN SPILIOPOULOS / STARRING: DWAYNE JOHNSON, JOHN HURT, IAN MC SHANE, RUFUS SEWELL, JOSEPH FIENNES, REBECCA FERGUSON, PETER MULLAN, AKSEL HENNIE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Talk about playing to your strengths. With a body like a condom full of rocks, Dwayne Johnson was born to play mythical hero Hercules and definitely appears much more comfortable than Arnie ever did during Hercules in New York. Brett Ratner's new take on the old legend is based on the graphic novel by Steve Moore and has plenty to recommend it.

The supposed son of Greek God Zeus and a mortal mother, Hercules has only one of his legendary labours left to complete as the film begins. The previous labours are all summed up in a 'previously on Hercules' introduction before The Rock gets serious, taking on the Herculean task of building an army and fighting a war. The myths surrounding Hercules are well known across Thrace but he and his band of merry men (and one woman) are really just simple mercenaries out to gain enough gold for an early retirement. When Lord Cots of Thrace (Hurt) asks for Hercules' help in quashing a deadly foe, he must battle his own personal demons and quite possibly some mythical creatures to save an empire.

So this is what The Rock has been building up to since taking on minor roles in films like *The Scorpion King*. Whereas that film was a disgraceful, turgid CGI mess, Hercules puts its hero front and centre and comes out on top. The muscle man who formerly rocked a fanny pack, now shows off more than

just an impressive six pack. He's a decent actor, an alpha male with a heart, and a hugely impressive physical specimen. His Hercules certainly looks the business. Whether it's years spent in the gym or the genes of Zeus that have made him that way, Dwayne Johnson is a convincing son of a God.

But Hercules himself is too earnest to be a really interesting character and even The Rock would find carrying this film a burden single-handedly. His tragic past and moody present as a mercenary warrior who just wants to seek solitude reeks of seen-it-all-before. Lucky then, that Hercules is surrounded by a colourful bunch of pantomime characters. Rufus Sewell shines in a rare role where he is not the instantly slappable bad guy, Ian McShane has a ball with his future-predicting visionary and Ingrid Bolsø Berdal is a brilliantly badass Amazonian archer. Refreshingly, it's not just the female character who gets stuck in a mini-skirt either. Hercules has an embarrassment of riches in its cast, also boasting the likes of John Hurt and Peter Mullan in major roles. While there is nothing truly meaty for them to get their teeth into, they are still given enough to do to justify the paycheques.

Once Hercules gets past his CGI labours and gets to the battles, Ratner ups the ante with some vicious and impressive battle scenes. The lack of blood is sometimes disappointing, but the mostly

practical fight scenes (with some CGI noticeably but not intrinsically used) create some satisfying carnage. The battles are immersive and tense and all the better for not being stuffed with CGI-created 'fucking centaurs' as the titular hero calls them.

As Hercules is tasked with turning farmers into soldiers, we get lumbered with the obligatory montage and there are no points for guessing any of the last act revelations. However, when the big man and his companions are threatened, it is still a pleasure to watch him unleash the beast on his captors. Sometimes, with all the sets, special effects and star power, you might just find your mind wandering, imagining what HBO could do given this kind of budget for the rest of Game of Thrones.

Still, after watching Dwayne Johnson pumping Fast and Furious and G.I. Joe full of his franchise Viagra, it is good to finally see him fill the frame as leading man. Hercules has been a labour of love for the ex-wrestler and his pet project doesn't disappoint. If you haven't already tried it, now might be a good time to smell what The Rock is cooking. It definitely doesn't stink.

PETE TURNER

EXPECTED ++++++ 4

ACTUAL +++++++ 6



## THE HOUSE OF MAGIC

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: BEN STASSEN, JÉRÉMIE DEGRUSON / SCREENPLAY: BEN STASSEN, JAMES FLYNN, DOMINIC PARIS / STARRING: MURRAY BLUE, GEORGE BABBIT, SHANELLE GRAY, EUGENE LEVY, GRANT GEORGE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When Thunder the cat is abandoned by his owners, he seeks refuge in the home of Lawrence, an ageing stage magician who entertains children at a local hospital. Embraced by the old man's horde of clockwork automata but mistrusted by his pets, rabbit Jack and mouse Maggie, he and they must nevertheless band together to prevent Lawrence's odious nephew Daniel from selling the house out from under him.

Unlike many animated films nowadays that are made to appeal to as large an age range as possible, *The House of Magic* is very much aimed at children. However, this doesn't necessarily need to be a bad thing. While it's very simple story lacks the necessary twists and turns to keep adults completely engaged, kids should respond very well to the inventive methods the animals dream up to scare away potential buyers of the house.



## THE NUT JOB

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: PETER LEPENIOTIS / SCREENPLAY: LORNE CAMERON, PETER LEPENIOTIS / STARRING: WILL ARNETT, BRENDAN FRASER, LIAM NEESON, KATHERINE HEIGL, MAYA RUDOLPH / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Set in 1959 (not that the era is of much relevance to the story) in the fictitious town of Oakton, *The Nut Job* sees a renegade and selfish squirrel named Surly (Arnett) falling out with his fellow park animals, led by Raccoon (Neeson), and being banished. However, when he finds himself hitting the jackpot at a peanut shop, which is currently a front for a bank robbery, the pack's desperation for food forces a fragile truce. To say that The

Nut Job has no ideas would be a fib; indeed the plot's story of selfishness opening up to generosity is a fine one for toddlers, and the ending refreshingly sees the hero choosing to stay out of the spotlight. That being said, by the time we get to the film's genuinely good-willed finale, most will be too bored to care about the resolution.

The real issue here is that anything that works is indebted to something else. For instance, Surly is like a

The human characters are a little one-note, but it's the animals who are the focus of the story and each of them has a distinct, if uncomplicated, personality. Thunder is sweet and lovable without being overtly cutesy (no Puss in Boots-style saucer eyes here) and as he is effectively a child himself, little kids will see something in him to relate to and find him engaging as an underdog hero.

The house itself is a lavishly designed labyrinth of wonder, somehow at once gloomy and gothic yet lively and colourful. Made in 3D rather than converted in post production, the visual spectacle truly benefits from the extra dimension, providing greater depth (figuratively and literally) to the images and a greater sense of scale for sharp angles. Although it is occasionally utilised in the slightly gimmicky way of having things thrown at the screen, such occurrences never feel forced and fit in with the natural progression of events.

For the most part, the prevailing atmosphere is one of adventure rather than peril, and the message of the importance

of trusting each other and working together is a good one for children to take away. Although things get a little intense at the film's climax – one example in particular will likely cause some viewers to balk at its use – the action is more exciting than outright scary.

Directors Ben Stassen and Jérémie Degruson have crafted a film that kids will enjoy endless repeat viewings of, and while their parents may get a little bored, they could certainly do a lot worse.

ANDREW MARSHALL

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL +++++++ 7



bad boy's answer to *A Bug's Life*'s Flick and the villain of the piece has Hopper inspired moments, not to mention a Lotso Huggin' Bear (*Toy Story 3*) vibe, replacing Sunnyside with a park. In fact, you spend half the time picking out where you have seen this or that in other movies. Antz, Bolt, Madagascar and especially *Over the Hedge* can all be felt in this film's DNA and it's all so lazily inconsequential. *The Nut Job* has a potentially interesting plot but the human element is drowned in naff gangster/heist film clichés and the animal's story feels too similar to other and better, animated fare.

Animation does not always have to be polished, heck, much of the appeal of madcap films like *Panique au Village*, *Belleville Rendezvous* and Wes Anderson's *Fantastic Mr. Fox* can be attributed to the rougher creative stylings. However, *The Nut Job* feels more like a Disney Junior television special than a cinema release. There is intermittent charm and certain settings are easy on the eye, but some of the voice-work feels forced and the jokes majorly fall flat. Arnett's leading

squirrel attempts to be a fluffier, naughtier version of Remy (from *Ratatouille*, also featuring Arnett) but is not as likeable. In fact the only really noble characters in the film are don't-call-me-Princess-Anna red squirrel Andie (Heigl) and the dozy dog Precious (Rudolph).

All in all – and with the teeth-grinding inclusion of an all-animal "Gangnam Style" rendition (not once but twice) neither forgotten nor forgiven – this animated effort is sadly a missable affair.

JACK BOTTOMLEY

EXPECTED ++++++ 6

ACTUAL +++++++ 4





## MOOD INDIGO

CERT: 12A / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: MICHEL GONDRY / STARRING: ROMAIN DURIS, AUDREY TAUTOU, GAD ELMALEH, OMAR SY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Imagine taking Roman Holiday directed by Federico Fellini channeling Pee Wee's Playhouse, the surreal imagery of Orson Welles' The Trial and throwing in the work of artist Mark Ryden. Mood Indigo is a visual treat using impressive stop motion animation and forced perspectives in a surreal, Kubrick-esque,

cinema vérité world, but sadly, Gondry's imagery goes on too long; delivering style but no substance. Wealthy bachelor Colin (Duris) spends his time creating odd, Rube Goldberg-inspired contraptions such as the piano cocktail (a cocktail-making piano that would make Liberace blush), enjoying

exotic dishes prepared by his friend and chef, Nicholas (Sy), while hanging out with his best buddy, Chick (Elmaleh) - a devout worshipper and collector of memorabilia of existentialist laureate, Jean-Sol Parte (an obvious reference to Jean-Paul Sartre).

A chance meeting at a party has him smitten by Chloe (Tautou), where they fall in love dancing to the music of Duke Ellington in a bizarre, nightmarish dance routine called the biglemoi, which looks like something from out of a 1940s' Warner Brothers cartoon.

One dream-like event leads to another in this strange, fantasy love story that includes a flying cloud crane lifting our starstruck lovers over Paris and the revolving flowers in the florist shop run by an owner whose dress changes as quickly as the flowers do.

Over time, our two lovers decide to wed, but must compete in a stop motion car race through an Escher-like church with Chick and his girlfriend. Whoever reaches the minister first, gets to be married,

which is quite creative.

Mood Indigo starts out as a fun, comical romp, but slowly spirals downward into a dark, sombre abyss that puts a dampener on the film, (especially with the melancholy ending). Gondry does a good job adapting Boris Vian's novels, but this film will probably only satisfy practical effects enthusiasts and followers of Vian's work.

WHITNEY SCOTT BAIN

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 6



## DAS CABINET DES DR. CALIGARI (1920)

CERT: U / DIRECTOR: ROBERT WEINE / SCREENPLAY: CARL MAYER, HANS JANOWITZ / STARRING: WERNER KRAUSS, CONRAD VEIDT, FRIEDRICH FREHER / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 29TH

Robert Weine's proto-horror movie united Expressionism and Freudian nightmares. The brand new 4K digital restoration of The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari is a marvel to behold and has revealed picture details possibly not seen, due to print quality issues, since 1920.

Two plot twists occur in the film, but it's the second one that is the most terrifying and thematically resonant. After the story is unveiled as the crazed imaginings of a damaged

brain, the wildly Expressionist sets remain. There is no return to a more naturalistic environment that would provide a clear delineation between fact and fantasy.

The representation of a reality with no basis in our world must have been startling at the time. The characters and the world they occupy are like Edvard Munch's 1893 masterpiece, The Scream, come to vivid life. Owing a clear debt to burgeoning avant-garde

fine art and theatre, the film's influence on other movies would in turn be massive.

A couple of scenes pivotal to the subsequent development of horror cinema: Cesare waking up during a show (he's a somnambulist controlled by the fiendish Dr. Caligari) and the kidnapping of Jane. Watching Cesare (Veidt) stirring from sleep at the command of his master's voice is like watching a dead body reanimate after zombification. The eyes express a profound confusion and sorrow. Here, this sideshow attraction – this carry ghoul act – appears to acknowledge his own monstrosity. A brilliant piece of acting by Veidt, it's a representation of a fiend resigned to his fate and yet it indicates, too, that not all monsters are inherently evil.

Even if the camera placement and framing (in general) does not replicate the wild angles of the magnificently artificial sets, the scene in which Cesare kidnaps Jane is noteworthy. Abandoning the initial close-ups and cuts of the sneaking murderer rising into view and creeping through a large set of glass doors,

director Weine uses deep-focus to excellent effect. Jane sleeps in the foreground and Cesare approaches the girl (and the camera) with a ghostlike stealth from the background. It is an early example of palpable screen terror.

Writers have suggested that The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari was a foreshadowing of the coming Nazi era. Whether you find such a theory fanciful or intriguing, the film has remained an important benchmark in cinema history as it presented us with the idea that celluloid visions could be haunting and sinister.

MARTYN CONTERIO

EXPECTED ++++++ 8

ACTUAL ++++++ 8



# REVIEWS

THE LATEST HOME  
VIDEO RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## THE LAST SHOWING

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: PHIL HAWKINS / STARRING: ROBERT ENGLUND, FINN JONES, EMILY BERRINGTON, MALACHI KIRBY / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 25TH

This low-budget, slow-burning horror has a very simple premise. Opening things up, we get introduced to Martin (Jones) and Allie (Berrington), a young couple who are out on a 'date night'. After taking in some cocktails, the pair visit their local cinema for a late night showing of *The Hills Have Eyes 2*. In said cinema, we find Stuart (Englund). With the young Clive (Kirby) as his manager, Stuart is old school in his approach to film. Dedicated to giving a piece of film the respect and attention it deserves, Stuart finds it hard to stomach how careless and unconcerned people seem to be about the small details that matter. Driven to his wits' end by his employment and its environment, Stuart snaps and decides to make his own twisted movie.

As *The Last Showing* progresses, it becomes clear that Englund's besmirched former projectionist has concocted a masterplan. Pulling strings from afar, he is the writer, director, editor, and audience of the movie that he is filming using various cameras across the cinema complex. Utilising the tools at his disposal, like the screens dotted around the site and the power to control the audio in the building; not to mention the controls to the electronic shutters that confine the cinema to isolation in the midst of a retail shopping park. Stuart manipulates his cast, Martin, Allie, and Clive, in order to give himself the movie experience that he has been craving.

A minimalistic, charismatic thriller that

slowly unravels a well constructed, slick and sinister story. *The Last Showing* is one of the most darkly charming British films of the last few years. Englund's puppeteer is the crazed cat that leads the poor, unsuspecting mice through his atmospheric maze. And that's wherein the film's charm lies: in its tension-heavy, slow-burning design. Sure, certain moments, particularly some of the earlier actions of Jones' Martin, may defy logic a tad, but there's enough warmth and genuine care to *The Last Showing* that these small gripes can be easily parlayed.

At the heart of the movie, holding things together, is a great turn from Robert Englund. Best known for the over-the-top, aggressive,

sadistic Freddy Krueger, the role of Stuart is completely removed from Springwood's famed child-killer. Understated, calculated and cunning, and also with an accent that sounds eerily like *Star Wars'* Anthony Daniels, Stuart is a "villain" who often makes valid points on modern cinemagoers, even if his methods are a tad extreme.

Clever, crazed and contagious, *The Last Showing* is a film that is awash with tradition, twists, atmosphere, and charm. Does for multiplexes what *Jaws* did for water.

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 7





## WOLF CREEK 2

**BD + DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: GREG MCLEAN / SCREENPLAY: GREG MCLEAN, AARON STERNS / STARRING: JOHN JARRATT, RYAN CORR, SHANNON ASHLYN, PHILIPPE KLAUS / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 15TH**

A follow-up to McLean's 2005 *Wolf Creek*, this sequel reacquaints audiences with Mick Taylor (Jarratt) and his twisted sense of humour and national pride. For those not familiar with the first film, Mick is a pig hunter who just so happens to have a penchant for torturing and slaughtering backpackers.

And in *Wolf Creek 2*, that's exactly what we see.

Whereas *Wolf Creek* eased us in gently to Taylor and his antics, this follow-up slams us straight into the action. After Mick has an early run-in with the law, the film's tone is firmly set, and before we know it, we get conveniently introduced to a couple of

young German tourists looking for a traditional taste of the Australian outback. Ever the willing tour guide, it's not long before Mick reaches out to the couple. In the blink of an eye, Paul (Corr) is added to the mix as Taylor looks to continue his sadistic tradition of torment and terror.

Given how part of the first movie's charm was in its slow build and pacing, it's a shame to see *Wolf Creek 2* take a different route. The action starts right from the opening of the movie, meaning that newcomers may find it hard to get to grips with Mick Taylor and his unique outlook. Similarly, this fast pace of action leads to a first half of the movie that has no real character development on either the side of the villain or his victims, as Taylor slices, shoots and explodes his way from pillar to post.

The second half of *Wolf Creek 2* does finally see the pace slow down, as Mick preys on Brit Paul. It's just a shame that the movie then descends into the territory of torture porn and over-the-top gore for the sake of it.

With Jarratt's Taylor coming across as more camp than in his previous outing, the needless splatter and comical tones of *Wolf Creek 2* does to the series what some of the *A Nightmare on Elm Street* sequels did to that franchise.

In terms of positives, the final third of the movie results in a nice change of scenery, whilst Ryan Corr offers a mildly charismatic performance. As for Jarratt, he does well when he's given more to do than just popping out one-liners or snarling to himself. And that's the problem: the film so often becomes repetitive and, as a result, boring. For every step *Wolf Creek 2* takes in the right direction, it takes five steps back through blood-soaked, quip-laden scenes that lose all effectiveness early on. Given the supposed long-term planning that went into this sequel, we quite frankly expected a hell of a lot more. And don't get us started on CGI kangaroos!

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 4

After a superb opening prologue where Maddy films a candid documentary about the cheerleading squad (which ends with such a fantastic shock it would be cruel to reveal it) aside from the occasional flourish, it's all downhill. Despite having all the hallmarks of what should make a great horror: the high school setting, lots of gore, bloodthirsty, nubile young women and a fantastic director onboard, All Cheerleaders Die sadly fails to live up to expectations. It's very well made (some dodgy effects aside) but feels too much like a selection of random sequences made to segue. Films such as *Heathers* and *Jennifer's Body* succeeded in representing the cutthroat nature of American high school life, thanks to a clear, focused set of characters to process the madness through. Despite the cast doing a great job, none of the antagonists or protagonists here are remotely likable, dead or undead. Therefore, we really don't care about their predicament. The girls are mostly head-wobbling pseudo-gangster-talking bitches (which

is pretty much what they call themselves) and the 'jocks' are lamebrain prejudiced morons. Even the wannabe-witch - who is the nearest we have to a hero figure - is a clingy, stalker type with few redeemable qualities.

That said, as a no-brain

teen horror film, it does the trick, but we really expected

more from it, particularly with the anticipation and McKee's pedigree, although it's still

much better than the original.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

+++++ 6



## ALL CHEERLEADERS DIE

**DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTORS & SCREENPLAY: LUCKY MCKEE, CHRIS SIVERTSON / STARRING: CAITLIN STASEY, SIANOA SMIT-MCPHEE, BROOKE BUTLER, AMANDA GRACE COOPER / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 15TH**

Back in 2001, writer/director Lucky McKee (*The Woman, May*) and Chris Sivertson (*The Lost*) made their debut by shooting an ultra-cheap feature on video. Now, the pair have remade and overhauled their obscure indie flick with this much slicker update.

When a position becomes available on the school's cheerleading squad, Maddy

(Stasey) decides she will try out in order to infiltrate and bring down the arrogant captain of the football team (Williamson), and the vacuous, bitchy cheerleaders. This horrifies her ex, Leena (Smit-McPhee), who just so happens to be a practicing Wiccan. After a disastrous night leaves the cheerleaders dead, Leena uses her powers to revive them, but they develop a taste for blood.



## PAINLESS

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JUAN CARLOS MEDINA / SCREENPLAY: JUAN CARLOS MEDINA, LUISO BERDEJO / STARRING: IRENE MONTALÁ, DEREK DE LINT, FÉLIX GÓMEZ, TÓMAS LEMARQUIS / RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 1ST

Director Juan Carlos Medina's debut feature film (co-written with one of the [REC] writers Luiso Berdejo) is a haunting, visceral allegorical horror exploring the Spanish conscience in the aftermath of the civil war. When a group of children are diagnosed with the affliction of feeling no pain (a real condition called congenital analgesia) they are snatched away from their family, forced into straitjackets, tattooed with a letter and hidden away from the

rest of the world in a sanatorium where they are experimented upon. Living without pain should be a sought after superpower but it turns out to be a curse. Cries of "what monster did this to them?" are screamed angrily and Medina looks to the past for the answer.

Two stories play out simultaneously; one beginning in 1931, spanning over a decade and telling the sad tale of these diseased children, the other set in the present day

following neurosurgeon, David Martel (Alex Brendemühl). David is involved in a terrible car accident from which he strangely emerges unscathed only to be told he is suffering from lymphoma. This leads him back to his family in search of a bone marrow donor, but things take a dark turn as the past rears its ugly head and some shocking secrets are revealed.

Tension and mystery mounts well as David searches the past and his heritage. Both stories mesh together without becoming confusing thanks to slick editing and an intriguing, well-paced narrative. The backdrop of the Spanish civil war and the isolated hospital set atop a hill, where the children live a strange existence, create an imposing and engrossing landscape and it plays out like a dark fairytale. Images of children setting themselves on fire, biting chunks out of their arms, slicing up cantankerous nurses and peeling their fingernails off will set your teeth on edge. Pools of blood adorn the screen after brutal acts are committed as a metaphor for the measures taken for eradication of

communism after the civil war.

The idea of what it means to be evil is searched and embodied in the character of Berkano played by the striking Lemarquis who appears emblazoned with scars all over his body. Just like Frankenstein's monster he is misunderstood, feared, and full of despair.

Medina looks at physical pain but this is also a philosophical look at the power of evil and conflict that is still affecting the present generation. Stolen childhoods, heinous deeds and a painful past are exposed in this visually original and extremely well thought out and impressive debut.

KATHERINE MC LAUGHLIN

+++++ 8



## I AM DIVINE

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: JEFFREY SCHWARZ / STARRING: DIVINE, MICHAEL MUSTO, JOHN WATERS, MINK STOLE, MARK PAYNE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Harris Glen Milstead's rise from bullied outsider at school in Baltimore to international cult icon known as Divine is a story that has been touched upon in documentaries several times over the years. These were usually in relation to his association with Waters, but *I Am Divine* focuses the spotlight purely on the one they called The Most Beautiful

Woman in the World. That is not to say that those wonderful counter-culture classics are not a massive part of the Divine story, but it's fantastic to see the other side of the larger-than-life character.

As well as footage from the well-known cult films, there is rare footage of her performing in off-off Broadway play *Women Behind Bars*, talk

show appearances in which he insisted as showing up as Glen, much to the bemusement of the hosts who obviously wanted the 'freak show' act, and a later, rather successful, disco career. From early collaborations with infamous troupes of hippies and drag queen from San Francisco, The Cockettes to excessive drug taking and worse still for Divine - eating (and not that scene in *Pink Flamingos*).

Director Schwarz (who also made the superb *Spine Tingler! The William Castle Story*) took to Indiegogo to finish the production, and the attention to detail and assortment of interviewees is astounding. Glen's mother, Frances, talking not too long before she herself died, gives an emotional account of her difficulties with her son, but also how wonderful it was to be reacquainted in later life. From the film world, naturally, Waters and co-star Mink Stole are present, but so are Tab Hunter (*Polyester*) and Ricki Lake (*Hairspray*).

The real tragedy to Divine's untimely passing, other than what one would normally

expect, was he was beginning to be accepted as an actor rather than just a drag queen, and that he never realised his full potential.

For a large part of the population, Divine means nothing. Some don't even realise the *Hairspray* musical is based on one of her films. To them, this is a must-see, if only to open their eyes to what is happening outside the mainstream. Those who already know and love Divine will cherish this documentary as both a tribute and testament to a great, much-missed talent.

MARTIN UNSWORTH

+++++ 10





## APOCALYPTIC

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: GLENN TRIGGS / STARRING: JANE ELIZABETH BARRY, GEOFF PINFIELD / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

The found-footage subgenre is often a cheap, easy and cynical way to generate scares. Since the mind-boggling success of 1999's *The Blair Witch Project*, there has been a slew of imitations, crowding an already overstuffed niche. Glenn Triggs' Australian horror *Apocalyptic* has done more to rejuvenate the found-

footage subgenre than any other film post-2000.

The film opens with documentary journalist Jodie, and Kevin (her camera man) attending an AA meeting where the pair catch wind of a backwoods cult. The duo go to investigate what appears to be a harmless enough commune led by a bloke who claims he's God reborn enacting out

a prophecy. Things inevitably turn sinister.

There are strong performances from both Jane Elizabeth Barry and Geoff Pinfield as Jodie and Kevin respectively, and the supporting cast do a great job, but it's David Macrae who gives a show-stealing turn as cult leader Michael Godson (see what they did there?), a demented spiritual leader, part Charles Manson, part Hannibal Lecter.

American film and TV is somewhat preoccupied with the Manson family, and cults are nothing new within the genre, but in an Australian context it really offers something fresh, creepy and effective. *Apocalyptic*, however, has more in common with Jim Jones' infamous suicide cult than the Tate murders.

Like *The Wicker Man*, the film is concerned with esoteric spiritual values versus Christianity, not as explicit, but it's there, bubbling under the surface. Kevin's light relief offers moments of respite that make this a complex and three-dimensional piece of storytelling, which never seems to take sides.

Coming in at well under 90 minutes, *Apocalyptic* doesn't take a huge time investment, but it's a demanding film nevertheless. A lot of the best horror is, at its heart, simple, and *Apocalyptic* is stripped back but no less effective. It builds up to an utterly harrowing ending as ambiguous as it is unflinching. There have been many Blair Witch imitations but *Apocalyptic* may just have done one better.

DOMINIC CUTHBERT

+++++ 8



## SCINTILLA

DVD / CERT: 18 / DIRECTOR: BILLY O'BRIEN / SCREENPLAY: ROB GREEN, BILLY O'BRIEN, G.P. TAYLOR / STARRING: JOHN LYNCH, CRAIG CONWAY, ANTONIA THOMAS, JUMLAYN HUNTER, MORJANA ALAOUI, BETH WINSLET, NED DENNEHY / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 18TH

Freed from a pending death sentence in an African prison, mercenary leader Powell is reunited with his team and given a job offer: extract a scientist from a former Soviet army base hidden deep in the war-devastated rubble of Eastern Europe, and remove specimens of the work being performed there. However, once they arrive, what should have been a simple undertaking soon turns into a desperate fight for survival as one horrific surprise after

another seems to be awaiting around every corner.

At least, we think that's the film that was trying to be made here, but the slow pace and lack of identifiable story beats mean that the end result is far less grandiose than the above description makes it sound.

The film just progresses from one scene to the next with little in the way of plot development, and after a lengthy base infiltration and descent into an underground network of

caverns, we enter the science lab and what little story there actually is gets divulged. Not much actually happens during the protracted build up (aside from encountering some shrieking syringe-wielding humanoids decked out like the Big Daddies from *BioShock*), which is rendered particularly egregious when we later learn there's a lift shaft that links the lab to the surface. While utilising this in the first place would have made the film almost half an hour shorter, that wouldn't necessarily have been a bad thing.

The soldiers are so generic you're better off distinguishing them by appearance rather than character, as they're sorely lacking anything resembling the latter and their implacable exteriors prevent us from ascertaining anything about what they're feeling, and thus why we should actually care about them.

The visual style of the film is distinctive enough, placing sterile science next to grimy industry, and the experimentation being undertaken beyond the catacombs has a lot of

potential both from a narrative and ethical perspective. But unfortunately, despite being the most attention-grabbing aspect of the whole film its only purpose seems to be to justify the events leading up to it and the inconsequential revelations that follow.

*Scintilla* is a mix of parts that don't slot together well enough to form a coherent whole. It's not eventful enough to be an action film, not engaging enough to be a mystery, not interesting enough to be a sci-fi and not scary enough to be a horror. Mildly distracting, but ultimately disposable.

ANDREW MARSHALL

+++++ 5





## FRAU IM MOND (1929)

BD + DVD / CERT: U / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: FRITZ LANG / STARRING: WILLY FRTSCH, GERDA MAURUS, KLAUS POHL / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 25TH

Anyone who knows their sci-fi history will know Metropolis, Fritz Lang's genre-defining dystopian epic. They may be less familiar with Frau im Mond, or Woman in the Moon, released just two years later in 1929, though it too deserves consideration by the genre's historians – it was the first movie to take space travel seriously.

After the scientific community ridicules Professor

Manfeldt's theories of gold on the moon, his friend Helius determines to prove him right. The opening act is certainly the weakest, as Lang takes his time with a drawn-out espionage plot – as Helius gathers his motley crew, including his colleague Windegger and Windegger's fiancee Friede, a shady business syndicate threaten and manipulate him into letting their agent Turner

on board. It's over an hour in before we finally get to see the rocket, but from this point on, the film ramps up the excitement.

In a time when Germany was keen on the idea of one day going to the moon, Lang put a lot of effort into getting the details right, employing real rocket scientist Hermann Oberth as a scientific advisor and even funding Oberth's experiments alongside the film. Sure, not everything's perfect – they crack open a brandy to celebrate having survived blast-off and wear chunky cardigans instead of spacesuits, but with the dangers of G-force and the first on-screen countdown to lift-off, it's an amazingly accurate depiction of space travel compared to what you might expect from the silent era.

Once they reach the moon, however, any accuracy is flushed down the space-toilet. Professor Manfeldt discovers a breathable atmosphere and bounds off, Wallace and Gromit-style, albeit in search of gold rather than cheese. By this point, though, tensions have risen among the group, and the characters' story is

engaging enough for these errors to be forgivable. As Windegger panics and tries to turn the rocket back, Turner puts his evil plans into action. And of course, there's a love story at the heart of it all – Helius' real reason for initially not wanting Windegger and his fiancée to join him was his repressed love for Friede, and soon they must deal with the possibility that not all of them will make it back to Earth...

Frau im Mond, though not a patch on the revolutionary Metropolis, is a fascinating piece of cinema history, with a stunning depiction of space travel, impressive set design, and a strong character story, all demonstrating Lang's artistry as a master of visual cinema. Combined with the superb crispness of this Blu-ray release and the intriguing fifteen-minute documentary that comes packaged with it (analysing the film's place within real-life rocket science), it's a purchase necessary for any classic sci-fi aficionado.

KIERON MOORE



## ALIEN ABDUCTION

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: MATTY BECKERMAN / SCREENPLAY: ROBERT LEWIS / STARRING: KATHERINE SIGISMUND, COREY EID, RILEY POLANSKI, JILLIAN CLARE, JEFF BOWSER / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 25TH

Hallelujah and praise the Gods of straight-to-DVD movies. Here's something we thought we'd never seen again in our lifetime – a tense and inventive found-footage movie which belies its lurid title to deliver some effective, economical visuals, a few scares and a real 'didn't see that coming' twist ending. Movie miracles can happen, it appears.

With its loose basis on real-life events – the 'Brown Mountain lights' phenomenon of North Carolina and the United States Air Forces' Project Blue Book investigation into UFOs – Alien Abduction introduces us to the Morris family, vacationing

in the Brown Mountain woods. Fortunately, everything they say and do is being recorded by the family's autistic son Riley (Polanski) and the film at least tries to rationalise his obsession with filming everything, no matter how terrifying, by depicting it as his way of coping and communicating with the world. Credibility is inevitably strained but our scepticism is soon swept away by the usual found-footage mantra of 'oh my God, oh my God' as the first weird thing happens in the middle of the night.

And to be fair to Alien Abduction, much of it actually

is pretty weird. The film quickly puts the Morris clan into jeopardy; bright lights illuminate the night, dead crows rain from the sky and most creepily, they find a tunnel full of abandoned cars, amongst which stalk mysterious inhuman creatures. The family flee deep into the woods and encounter a dubious, grumpy, gun-happy redneck, all the time pursued by fleetingly seen creatures. It seems there's no escape; before long the family are trapped, the blinding lights of some thunderous alien machine flooding through the cracks in the walls and ceilings. It's eerie and it's unsettling because of what we don't see rather than what we do and it becomes gripping and unnerving enough for us to briefly forget that this nightmare is being scrupulously filmed by an 11-year-old boy who, in reality, would have dropped his camera and run for the hills screaming at the top of his voice hours earlier.

The film punches way above its weight in the last few minutes. Abductees are lifted into the air in beams of lights, their backs casually broken, before they're swept up into some sort of machine in which terrible

experiments are conducted. Riley's still filming until the aliens decide that enough's enough and chuck his camera out of their ship and it spins back down to Earth, where it's found and collected by the USAF. As the credits roll there's one last twist in the tale which is genuinely worth sticking around for.

Alien Abduction is surprisingly solid stuff, a breath of fresh air in the stale found-footage world. The script gets the job done; the acting's no better than it needs to be, but the film drips atmosphere and delivers moments of genuine unease as the Morris family come to terms with the fact that they're dealing with something way outside the sphere of human experience. Their terror is real, it's palpable and it's believable. Even if you're bored witless by found-footage films by now – and who could blame you – Alien Abduction gives the genre a much-needed shot in the arm and comes surprisingly highly recommended.

PAL MOUNT





## ENEMIES CLOSER

BD + DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: PETER HYAMS / SCREENPLAY: ERIC BROMBERG, JAMES BROMBERG / STARRING: JEAN-CLAUDE VAN DAMME, TOM EVERETT SCOTT, ORLANDO JONES, LINZEY COCKER / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

This latest straight-to-home-release JCVD-starrer is a fun, if predictable, actioner that sees the 'Muscles from Brussels' teaming up once more with director Hyams (*Timecop, Sudden Death*). Early on, we're introduced to Henry (Scott), a former Navy SEAL-turned-Forest Ranger who seeks isolation in a forest located on the US/Canadian border. What

Henry doesn't realise is that Clay (Jones) is set to turn up at his door with revenge on his mind for his brother's death; a brother who died on duty whilst under the leadership of Henry back in the day. With the two at odds, they must work together to fight the crazed menace of Xander (Van Damme), a French-Canadian vegan who happens to be heading up a drug cartel

in search of some lost cargo that went down near to the peaceful, idyllic forest. Yes, after his scene-stealing turn in *The Expendables 2*, JCVD is once again playing the bad guy.

*Enemies Closer* may be a film that is firmly aimed at fans of '80s action movies, but from the opening moments of JCVD taking down a group of guys by simply using various computer accessories (all that's missing is a USB drive shoved up someone'sarse), you can't help but be drawn in by Hyams' movie. Make no mistake, it's riddled with cheesy dialogue, some massively over-the-top brawls, and one-liners that would make Arnold Schwarzenegger's Mr Freeze proud ("Put the kayak down"; "You make one wrong move, you're gonna have a new asshole"). Central to the film is another staple of '80s cinema: angsty partners. Scott and Jones' characters, despite some clear differences and bickering, have to team up to take down Van Damme. Reminiscent of the Roddy Piper/Keith David dynamic from *They Live*, the two are just as happy cracking wise as they are with having a

slapstick fight involving tins of soup and irons.

Of course, Van Damme is the flagship name here, and he delivers a likable loony performance, making you wonder why it took so long for him to turn to the dark side after all these years. Don't be expecting the serious, hand-shaking, baby-kissing good guy that throws out a quip or two – this Van Damme hams it up something rotten, producing an erratic villain who, in the blink of an eye, goes from talking about carbon footprints to ramming a branch through somebody's windpipe. Meanwhile, Jones is decent, although it's hard to really buy into *Dead Man on Campus* and *An American Werewolf in Paris'* Scott as an action-type of guy.

At a running time of just over 100 minutes, *Enemies Closer* is breezy, enjoyable fun that's not to be taken too seriously. Predictable, yes, but it's worth a watch just to see Van Damme's crazed hairdo.

ANDREW POLLARD

+++++ 6



## REMO WILLIAMS: THE ADVENTURE BEGINS (1985)

BD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: GUY HAMILTON / SCREENPLAY: CHRISTOPHER WOOD / STARRING: FRED WARD, JOEL GREY, WILFORD BRIMLEY, KATE MULGREW / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins wanted to be James Bond so much it hurts. Based on *The Destroyer*, a long-running series (149 titles so far!) of pulp novels created by Warren Murphy and Richard Sapir concerning the exploits of super-agent Remo Williams, the movie version roped in Bond director Guy Hamilton and sometime Bond screenwriter Christopher Wood. But the magic didn't happen; it seemed

that the world was quite happy with the James Bond it already had and didn't really see the need for what was described on the film's release as a "red, white and blue-collar" version of 007.

Nearly thirty years later and Remo reappears in a beautifully packaged new Blu-ray from Arrow which more than does the title justice. It's a charming little film but perhaps its downfall lies in the fact that

Fred Ward's Remo, a New York cop recruited against his wishes into a covert espionage organisation, just isn't brutal enough. The tone of the film is relentlessly tongue-in-cheek, much of it played for laughs and too much time is spent focusing on Remo's training. He's paired up with an inscrutable Korean martial arts guru Chiun (played, uncomfortably, by famously non-Korean actor/dancer Joel Grey). Chiun teaches Remo how to harness his own body's innate hidden strength and abilities to turn him into a ruthless human killing machine (although he never actually kills anyone). It's all good fun stuff with Remo falling off wires, plunging into sand dunes and hanging from fairground ferris wheels, but it takes an age for the actual plot to get going – and when it does, it's a mundane affair involving a corrupt weapons procurement scam. Snooze.

But despite its stodgy pace and idling, un hurried narrative, there's plenty to recommend in *The Adventure Begins* (also released as *Unarmed and Dangerous*). Craig Safan's fabulously 1980s synth-

drenched score is instantly memorable and the Blu-ray is worth the price of admission just for the breathtaking action sequence set on and around the Statue of Liberty, covered in scaffolding at the time of the filming. Years before CGI and green screen took much of the real skill out of this type of big set-piece, the sequence is all the more impressive because it's done with real stuntmen on a real location taking what look like insane risks for the sake of a motion picture. It's a fantastic scene and acrobatics may want to look the other way.

Remo Williams: The Adventure Begins was a franchise-to-be that arrived stillborn but the intervening years haven't treated it too shabbily. Tonally it's all over the place but Fred Ward's a likeable, craggy lead and, with a better focused script and less comedy shenanigans, Remo Williams really could have been a contender. But sadly, the adventure begins and ends here.

PAUL MOUNT

+++++ 6



## HAROLD AND MAUDE (1971)

DVD / CERT: 15 / DIRECTOR: HAL ASHBY / SCREENPLAY: COLIN HIGGINS / STARRING: BUD CORT, RUTH GORDON / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Okay, I'm going to pitch you a coming-of-age love story about a young man obsessed with death, who falls in love with a 79-year-old free spirit that he meets at a funeral. Imagine that pitch being kicked around Hollywood these days. We'd probably be faced with a brooding, Robert Pattinson-esque Harold being paired up with a more comfortably aged Jennifer Aniston-esque cougar Maude.

Thank Zeus' beard then that Harold and Maude was made in 1971 at the height of the new wave of experimental,

independent American cinema.

There are two things that strike you most about watching Harold and Maude. The first is the brilliance of the comedy, which balances both subtlety and in your face gags with the perfect blend of script, direction and performance. There is a moment of comedy perfection when, after one of the film's many mock suicides, Hal Ashby holds the camera on Bud Cort's face. The punchline is delivered without a word of dialogue, simply by the look on Cort's face.

The second, and possibly

more striking thing about the film is how beautifully the love story plays out. The chemistry between Cort and Ruth Gordon has an ease and natural feel that makes them one of the iconic screen couples. The scenes they have together have a spark and humour that is so genuinely touching that you almost forget the age difference between them.

Harold and Maude is one of those cult classic films from an experimental age that most people have probably never even heard of, and that works in its favour. To tell you too much about the film before you've seen it would take away a lot of the delights to be

discovered within it. Instead we will sell it to you by saying: "Just watch it. You'll love it."

The Blu-ray contains a really nice picture transfer of the film and offers two audio options (mono and stereo). The bonus features are fine, being made up of an interview/discussion with critic David Cairns and an audio commentary by Ashby biographer Nick Dawson and producer Charles B. Mulvehill. There are a couple of nice factoids in both, but they are quite dry and flat at times.

STUART MULRAIN

+++++ 9



## VAMPIRE ACADEMY

DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR & SCREENPLAY: DANIEL WATERS / STARRING: ZOEY DEUTSCH, LUCY FRY, DANILA KOZLOVSKY, GABRIEL BYRNE / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Having died an embarrassing undeath at the American box office earlier this year, this toothless adaptation of Richelle Mead's 'best-selling' young adult novel receives a perfunctory DVD release in the UK having been pulled from its planned theatrical run. But even on DVD (there's no UK Blu-ray version) it's dead on arrival and it's not hard to see why.

It appears that seventeen-year-old Dhampir (half human/

half-vampire) Rose Hathaway is on the run (for entirely unexplained reasons) with her royal Moroi (peaceful vampire) best friend Lissa Dragomir. Within the first fifteen minutes of the movie, where the art of clumsy info-dumping is taken to new extremes, Rose and Lissa are dragged back to St Vladimir's, a Hogwarts-like school for vampires. But evil vampires, the Strigoi, who hunt and kill like proper vampires

should, are on their trail. Back at the school, Rose and Lissa have to deal with teenage rivalries and jealousies and danger from within the school's own walls which threatens Lissa's safety.

Seriously, who could really care about any of this stuff? Even the teen audience Vampire Academy is aimed at stayed away in droves and who can blame them? This is a warmed-up stew combining ingredients from Harry Potter and Twilight with a bit of Buffy-lite smartmouth dialogue thrown in for good measure. But it's a concoction which just never comes to life. The writing is stilted and self-conscious, the acting's perfunctory at best (and, in the case of Lucy Fry, pretty terrible) and the budget clearly can't stretch to much in the way of decent visual effects.

Lumbered with a dull, incomprehensible and downright uninteresting plot weighted down by far too much dizzying backstory, Vampire Academy has little to recommend it apart from one or two well-staged fight sequences and a commendably optimistic ending which hints at

a sequel which, mercifully, will never happen. It's a horrible and lifeless husk of a film designed to cash-in on lingering Potter/Twilight popularity but it's so blatantly, unapologetically cynical that even tweens still yearning for their fix of sparkly Robert Pattinson won't be fooled again this time. If its risible box office takings haven't already done the job, then let's hope Ostfeld can step in and close Vampire Academy down for good. No one comes out of this terrible shambles with any merit or distinction whatsoever.

PALMOUNT

+++++ 2





## ASHENS AND THE QUEST FOR THE GAMECHILD

DVD / CERT: PG / DIRECTOR: RIYAD BARMANIA / SCREENPLAY: STUART ASHEN, RIYAD BARMANIA / STARRING: STUART ASHEN, WARWICK DAVIS, ROBERT LLEWELLYN, VICTORIA BROOM, DAN TOMLINSON, CHRIS KENDALL, CHRIS BINGHAM, MILLIE REEVES, SULE RIMI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Stuart Ashen is best known for his YouTube videos in which he sarcastically reviews tat on his brown sofa under the cunning pseudonym Ashens, though you may also know him through his sketch comedy. Ashens and the Quest for the GameChild is a humorous science fiction caper that casts this unlikely celebrity as an Indiana

Jones-like seeker of pointless artefacts, specifically the GameChild which in this movie is a super-rare handheld games console. In reality, it is a rather worthless bit of tat, that's the joke.

For those unfamiliar with the Ashens channel, this is a deeply silly and laugh-out-loud screwball comedy, filled with pop culture references

and some rather strange characters. Those in the cult of Ashens will recognise the likes of rubbish corporate mascot Chef Excellence and camp villain The Silver Skull. The feature manages to squeeze these things in without confusing the uninitiated; a chap in a silver mask and nylon moustache playing a synthesiser is going to be funny regardless of context after all. Though at times it feels like a series of skits stitched together with a very broad plot, it's the performance of both Mr Ashen and his sidekick, played by the excellent Dan Tomlinson, that keeps it all together. Highlights include an animated sequence by Oli Putland and a theme song by Harry Partridge, a surprise appearance by Warwick Davies and a suitably silly performance from Red Dwarf's Robert Llewellyn.

If all of this sounds familiar, be aware that Ashens and the Quest for the GameChild is a remastered version of the movie that was launched on YouTube, with the original production

costs met through crowd-funding and multi-platform firm Channel Flip. Every penny spent can be seen on the screen and for a small-budget flick, the result is pretty fantastic. The movie will also stay available (for free) on the internet, though the DVD/Blu-ray features upgraded sound and picture quality and a few extra bits (mostly jokes) have been added. They've also stuffed the disc full of very silly extras. The art gallery tour is particularly daft and filled with Ashens' trademark sarcasm. Over all, this a great little movie that could well be the start of a new wave of British comedy.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8



## RAPTURE (1965)

BD + DVD / CERT: 12 / DIRECTOR: JOHN GUILLERMIN / SCREENPLAY: STANLEY MANI / STARRING: PATRICIA GOZZI, MELVYN DOUGLAS, DEAN STOCKWELL, GUNNEL LINDBLOM / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

John Guillermin's coming-of-age love story involves a most unusual case of mistaken identity when handsome young escaped convict Joseph (Stockwell, before his time-travelling and space adventures) is fancifully assumed by fey farm-girl Agnes (Gozzi) to be her scarecrow come to life.

All is not well in Agnes' remote homestead. The silent expressions of the characters

in the opening shots signal an oppressive tension, a storm front that lingers threateningly on the horizon. Guillermin fills his drama with a disquieting atmosphere to match his provocative themes – the young Agnes lustng after Joseph; comely housekeeper Karen's (Lindblom) lover sneaking into her room late at night, leading to blackmail; the harbouring of a fugitive and a father's distant

relationship with his daughter. But all this is offset with an affection, compassion and thoughtfulness, and under Guillermin's directorial eye, Rapture becomes a chamber drama of light and shadow. It moves at an assured pace, signalling Guillermin's own self-confidence in the era of the titans of the Nouvelle Vague.

You see in the movie shades of Polanski's early suspenseful works (*Knife in the Water* and *Repulsion*), and the iconic wandering women who are the core of the filmic worlds of Alain Resnais and

Michelangelo Antonioni. The coastal setting pictorially frames Agnes as living on the edge of her world, and despite a desire to control and shape it, she is forced to dwell on the divide between fantasy and reality. In a way, she's almost like Antoine Doinel's (*The 400 Blows*) better half – the two iconic young dreamers of '60s cinema who share an intimate encounter with the coastline.

PAUL RISKER

+++++ 8





## A CLOWN'S RECOVERY

DVD / DIRECTOR: MATTHEW BROOMFIELD / STARRING: ALBERT CADABRA / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Not, as one might imagine, given Chemical Burn Entertainment's usual output, a horror film about killer clowns. No, *A Clown's Recovery* is in fact a documentary which follows circus entertainer 'Jelly Boy' the clown in his recovery from serious (non-circus) burn-related injuries. Like Jackass crossed with a Panorama news report, it's as real as it gets.

So yes, a documentary, but bear with it. As low-budget and dirty as anything Chemical Burn have ever found and put out

(even their documentaries look off-puttingly cheap), *A Clown's Recovery* tells a fascinating, enlightening and even feel-good story that is well worth hearing out. Granted, the fact that there's a grammatical error before the credits have even rolled doesn't bode well, but that only adds to the film's odd charm.

Jelly Boy's shocking injuries (burns covering 15% of his body, plus smoke inhalation) and subsequent recovery (not a spoiler, it's in the title) are all covered



## MONKEY BOY

DVD / DIRECTOR: ANTONIO MONTI / SCREENPLAY: ANTONIO MONTI, CHIARA PARODI, DAVIDE ZAGNOLI / STARRING: GIAMPIERO BARTOLINI, GIANNA FANTONI / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

When an old woman dies suddenly, the mutant monster who lives in her cellar is free to explore the world and harass the innocent young women in it. Like *Texas Chainsaw 3D* crossed with *Castle Freak*, with a fairytale twist, *Monkey Boy* is the most dreamlike horror film this side of Guillermo del Toro, complete with princesses, dice and... you know, a Monkey Boy.

Del Toro is the obvious frame of reference for *Monkey Boy*, which is so much concerned with its visuals that

it frequently forgets about the story. That's fine for the likes of the great Guillermo, but when your budget can only just stretch to a semi-decent monkey costume (think *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*), you have a bit of a problem.

Thankfully, it's just about intriguing enough to retain viewer interest throughout. Dialogue is sparing, leaving it feeling almost like a silent movie at times. It has that in common with its heroine – the film's would-be heroine, a

in this biopic, which uses talking head interviews, dramatisations, archive footage and animation to tell its tale. It's all very rough and ready (the animation looks as though it could have been done on Microsoft Paint) but the humanity of the story negates such quibbles. The description of the initial fire and Jelly Boy's injuries speak for themselves – the film does perfectly well without a high-budget dramatisation.

Director and narrator Matthew Broomfield – Jelly's own brother – does a good job of keeping the story anchored, garnering sympathy and interest without feeling self-indulgent or too personal. What follows is the

tale of Jelly's almost miraculous recovery, assisted by his circus family. It's weirdly uplifting, in its own very punk way.

From Pennywise the Dancing Clown to the Killer Klowns from Outer Space, horror cinema has gathered quite the collection of famous funnymen over the year. So very real and painful, Matthew Broomfield and his miraculously *Clown's Recovery* deserves to be one of them – if only for the sheer perseverance that makes this documentary such fascinating viewing.

JOEL HARLEY

+++++ 7



teenage mute girl, traumatised by the death of her mother, obsessing over a pair of dice. The other characters (split up into their own 'chapters') consist of a cop, a prostitute, the princess' dad and Monkey Boy himself. Writer and director Antonio Monti pushes the fairytale element a little too hard (one character is even dressed like Snow White) but it's an interesting touch that you don't get too much in mainstream horror outside of the likes of *del Toro* and *chums*. There's an almost Lovecraftian element to it too, although that could just be a hangover from the similarities to *Castle Freak*.

*Monkey Boy* is another

interesting acquisition by Chemical Burn, who are slowly gathering a catalogue of odd horror from around the world. Granted, the quality can vary and the budgets are barely higher than your average back-garden epic, but at least they try hard – most of the time, anyway. Detractors of low-budget horror will be unimpressed by the resolutely dingy, cheap *Monkey Boy*, but the more adventurous should find something to appreciate in its creepy, dreamlike atmosphere and surreal overtones.

JOEL HARLEY

+++++ 7



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# OST

THE STARBURST  
GUIDE TO THE LATEST  
SOUNDTRACKS  
BY NICK SPACEK



**M**arvel's *Guardians of the Galaxy* is arguably the biggest film of the summer, and they're doing up the musical releases from it in a right proper way. You have several options: there's the Tyler Bates' score, the *Awesome Mix Vol. 1* – which features the pop music included in the film that Peter Quill listens to on his Walkman – or a "Deluxe Edition," featuring both. Bates is on fire lately, and it's amazing to see him move so deftly from the subtleties of *The Sacrament* to the big-screen sci-fi action pomposity without losing his identity in the process. All three versions of the *Guardians* music are available now from Hollywood Records.

Another month, another new label. *Ship to Shore Phonograph Co.* announced their November 11th release of the soundtrack to Tromá's trash classic, *Class of Nuke 'Em High*. It's actually more of a soundtrack than film score, featuring a selection of music featured in the movie and its sequel, *Subhumanoid Meltdown*. In addition to the rather rocking punk-metal hybrid cuts by Ethan & the Coup, the soundtrack features a rare early cut by power-pop act the Smithereens, *Much Too Much*. It

comes as a pressing of 1000 vinyl LPs, with 700 copies on 180-gram black, and 300 copies on "Dewey's Meltdown" splatter. Additionally, there's a digital download with "track-by-track commentary by Tromá president Lloyd Kaufman." Given Kaufman's hilarious intros to Tromá DVDs, that alone should be worth the purchase price.

Intrada's latest batch of releases appeal very much to the horror hound in all of us. I'm most excited about the Les Baxter score to the Vincent Price film, *House of Usher*. Baxter's film work was always quite different from his better-known exoticia music, but equally excellent in all ways. This is a reissue identical to Intrada's 2011 release, but it's nice to see it back in print, as it's a wonderfully atmospheric bit of creepiness. The same goes for Hugo Friedhofer's score to the 1976 movie, *Die Sister Die!* – also known as *The Companion*. Friedhofer's work is more angular flourishes than Baxter's lush strings, but they both work well to create atmospheres that complement their films.

La-La Land has limited edition releases of a pair of '80s science fiction favorites which couldn't be more different,

both in terms of sounds and films. First is the limited-to-2500 compact disc edition of John Corigliano's score for Ken Russell's *Altered States*. It's been remastered and features liner notes from Jeff Bond, as well as the composer himself. Second, and a complete 180-degree turn away, is the Marvin Hamlisch's score to the 1985 android kid movie, *D.A.R.Y.L.* In addition to Hamlisch's score is the Teddy Pendergrass song from the film, *Somewhere I Belong*, which was a minor R&B hit when it was released. Bond again contributes liner notes.

In conjunction with film reissue company Vinegar Syndrome, Connecticut metal and industrial label No Visible Scars will release a 7-inch featuring music from the 1985 schlock horror compilation film, *Night Train to Terror*. The a-side will feature the somewhat infamous *Everybody But You*, with the flipside having *Greta's Theme*. The label's looking at a late September or early October release. No word as to whether or not there will be a workout clothing dance party to celebrate.

Speaking of indefinite release dates, Massacre Video will have a super-deluxe release of Adam Ahlbrandt's film, *The Cemetery*, sometime in October. The film, about "a team of paranormal investigators must fight for their lives after accidentally releasing a demon from a forgotten cemetery," has become rather beloved by gore fans since its release last year. In addition a standard double-disc DVD, and limited VHS and hardbox releases, there will be a hand numbered, limited-to-1000, four-disc Blu-ray/DVD/Soundtrack CD combo pack. The tracklisting to the soundtrack hasn't been finalized, but will likely feature music from the variety of metal bands featured in the film.

Now that *Snowpiercer* has seen a proper release, Marco Beltrami's score



to the post-apocalyptic sci-fi actioner is out on CD via Varese Sarabande. It's a bombastic collection of pieces, but also manages to work in some quietly thoughtful bits, as well, which nicely reflects the film itself. The sinister, nerve-wracking Axe Gang might be one of Beltrami's best pieces, but the entirety of the score is worth hearing. It's got an excellent arc – it builds, ebbs, and flows beautifully.

For those who want to see film music performed live, it's a rare occasion when someone other than John Williams takes to the conductor's podium to direct an orchestra. However, on October 10th and 11th, Hans Zimmer will take to the stage of the Hammersmith Apollo for a "Hans Zimmer Revealed" concert. According to press releases, the show comes in two parts, with the first being a selection of Zimmer's film score work, and the second re-imagining "some of his most iconic themes" with "special guests from the rock and pop world". While Zimmer's not the most adventurous composer working today, this is a rare chance to see such a high-profile figure and they're promising pieces from *Gladiator*, *The Dark Knight Rises*, and *Inception*, so it's sure to be a bombastic good time – even if tickets start £67.00.

For gamers, there's nothing more familiar than the chiptune music from the classic '80s Nintendo series.

Sumthing Else Music Works has mined that nostalgia and familiarity with one of the most iconic franchises ever, both in terms of name recognition and music: *Mega Man*. The first two volumes in what will eventually be a ten-volume series collecting the music of composers Manami Matsumae and Takashi Tateishi are out now for digital download. The collections feature all of the music from the games, and include both the Nintendo and PlayStation versions of the themes. Nothing is too small; even the brief "game over" sound makes the cut. Needless to say, these are exhaustively complete.

Strange Disc's remastered release of the *Surf Nazis Must Die* score is now up for pre-order. It ships early-to-mid-September, depending on whether you're in the States or across the pond. It comes on black vinyl, with randomly inserted "Blood in the Water" color vinyl, as well, with artwork by composer Jon McCallum himself. However, we've already mentioned all that



in a previous column, so we called up label head Cameron Dean and talked about how the label got started, his inspirations, and how Surf Nazis came to be.

Dean got involved in the soundtrack business like many others – he'd always listened to soundtracks and liked soundtrack albums.

"I think they're cool, you know?" says Dean. "I think it's really interesting to take all the sounds that come from a movie and kind of transform them into an album. I think it's a really cool concept, and it's something that has fascinated me. That's kind of why I wanted to dive into it."

The Strange Disc head had the idea for his first Strange release almost a year ago, and it's taken that full year to get *Surf Nazis* to the presses. It took longer than he originally thought.

"You think you can take these songs, put them on a record, pay a guy to make some artwork, and that's it, but for some

reason, it always takes a long time," Dean explains. "Some of the hurdles along the way included trying to locate one of the songs from the soundtrack not done by composer McCallum, Andrew Spindler's *Nobody Goes Home*.

"It was tough, because the master doesn't exist for it anymore. We tried every single option and there was nobody who had it. So, we ended up having the dude who did the song originally re-record it. It wasn't ideal, but everybody involved in the project felt that the song was important enough to the album that it should be on there in one form or another."

The question that always comes up when a label has their first release in the pipe and ready to go is: anything coming up next? Dean says yes, but can't really comment, because they're not finalised. However, he says, "there are three, maybe even four records that I'm working on at the moment."

As to what we can expect, it's safe to assume he's aiming for a particular niche, as the Strange Disc logo brings to mind a sort of '80s VHS focus.

"That's kind of the idea. I really want this label to have a vibe. Like with *Sacred Bones* – you pick it up, and you know what label it's on. That's kind of the idea for this label, too."

But yeah – very '80s influenced, but at the same time, I want it to be very modern. I want it to be very deeply rooted in the influences, but not rehashing things that were cool thirty years ago, by being very modern at the same time."

Finally, right as we went to press, Waxwork Records announced their pre-orders for *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* have been pushed back to August 26th. They'll go live at some random time that day.



# BRAVE NEW WORDS

ED FORTUNE BRINGS YOU THE LATEST NEWS FROM THE WORLD OF GENRE LITERATURE



## DRAGONRIDERS OF PERN Movie Rights Optioned

Warner Brothers have optioned the *Pern* book series from the estate of American-Irish author Anne McCaffrey. The 22 volume sci-fi/fantasy series has a cult following, and it is likely that the first movie will see the fire-breathing, telepathic dragons team-up with humans to defeat a deadly alien spore. The deal has been engineered by Warner Bros executive Drew Crevello, whose previous experience includes handling the *X-Men* franchise for Fox. Names that have been attached to the project in the past include *Battlestar Galactica* boss Ronald D. Moore and David Hayter, though neither of these gentlemen seem to be currently involved.

## Diamond Reports Rise in Graphic Novel Sales

International comic book vendor Diamond announced a rise in the purchase of graphic novels in the first half of 2014. Speaking at San Diego Comic Con, the firm, which supplies goods to comic shops and bookstores all over the world, reported an almost 3% rise in graphic novel purchases and a whopping 10% rise in related merchandise. The interest in periodical comic books (singles) continues to wane however, with a slight 1% drop in sales.

## The Kitschies 2014 Open for Nominations

Progressive, intelligent and entertaining book award The Kitschies have begun their search for nominees for their 2014 awards. The categories are current novel, debut novel, cover art and a special award. 2013's finalists were selected from a record 234 submissions, from over fifty publishers and imprints.

## Man Booker Prize Ignores Genre, Again

Prestigious but niche book award The Man-Booker Prize has announced its long list. Despite the growing relevance of cult, fantasy and science fiction across the world, the only book of passable interest to genre junkies is Howard Jacobson's *J*, a love story set in the future. This is the first year that American authors have been permitted to be on the list, but hasn't made it any more relevant to those who read broadly.

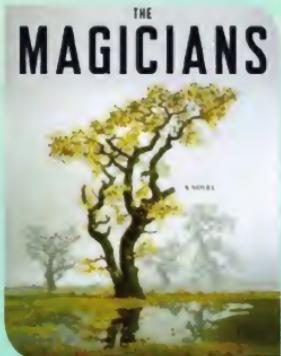


## Warner Brothers to further develop the world of HARRY POTTER

Warner Bros has created a new development team to manage the *Harry Potter* franchise, that will be mostly based in England and will work closely with the franchise's creator, J.K. Rowling. The popular Scottish author recently wrote a story for the Pottermore website detailing the activities of a thirty something Harry at the Quidditch World Cup, though Rowling has firmly denied that she will write more about the older version of Harry, concentrating instead on her crime fiction. *Potter*-fans should not lose hope, however. She is also working on a stage play about Harry's early years.

## Syfy Greenlights Pilot of THE MAGICIANS

The almost unseemly rush to develop something as commercially successful as *Game of Thrones* has led genre TV channel Syfy to commission a pilot for *The Magicians*, an adaptation of Lev Grossman's best-selling fantasy book trilogy. The one-hour drama will be written by John McNamara (*Prime Suspect*) and Sera Gamble (*Supernatural*). Michael London and Janice Williams are producing. The books follow the misadventures of a group of New York twenty-somethings who, while studying magic, discover the fantasy world they read about as children is all too real and poses a grave danger to humanity.



ED FORTUNE  
HIGHLIGHTS  
NOTEWORTHY  
NEW TITLES

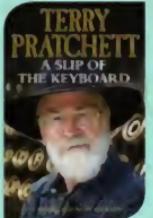
# COMING SOON



## BÊTE

AUTHOR: ADAM ROBERTS  
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 25TH

Adam Roberts can be relied on to come up with something thought-provoking and unusual and *Bête* certainly seems to be that. This is a book that begins with a man killing a cow. The twist is that the cow has been injected with an artificial intelligence so the man has to talk to the creature first, and it promises to get weirder from that point on.



## A SLIP OF THE KEYBOARD: COLLECTED NON-FICTION

AUTHOR: TERRY PRATCHETT  
PUBLISHER: DOUBLEDAY  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 25TH

Though better known for his Discworld novels, Pratchett's essays, musings and journalism have always been worth a read. Expect a wide collection of his work and the odd lip wobble when he talks about the things closest to him, from musings on mushrooms to what it means to be a writer, memories of Granny Pratchett, speculation about Gandalf's love life, orangutans and Dignity in Dying.



## KINSLAYER (GOTREK & FELIX)

AUTHOR: DAVID GUYMER  
PUBLISHER: BLACK LIBRARY  
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 7TH

With Gotrek Gurnisson and Felix Jaeger finally separated, could this be the last adventure for the smooth-talking scribe and the surly-yet-indestructible dwarf? Will Felix stay married and settle down with the family business in Altdorf? Will Gotrek embark on his final, suicidal mission and redeem himself for sins committed long ago? Given that this is part one in a series, probably not, but it is the first part in the ominously titled "The Doom of Gotrek Gurnisson" so you never know, Black Library may finally lay the old dwarf to rest sometime soon. We doubt it though.



## ELITE DANGEROUS: NEMORENSIS

AUTHOR: SIMON SPURRIER  
PUBLISHER: GOLLANCZ  
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 16TH

Elite Dangerous: Nemorensis is set in the world of Elite, a world based upon the classic 80's spaceship fighting and trading game of the same name. The novel follows the plight of two lovers who steal a spaceship and go on the run, attacking at random and revelling in the fame and glory it gets them. Spurrier is quite good at weaving a dense and clever tale of death, blood and redemption, so this should be fun.



## THE HIVE CONSTRUCT

AUTHOR: ALEXANDER MASKILL  
PUBLISHER: DOUBLEDAY  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 25TH

When a powerful computer virus begins shutting down the life-giving implants that belong to the poorest inhabitants of New Cairo, it's up to resistance hacker Zala Ulora to find out how to switch off this malignant programme before it kills everyone. Cutting edge science fiction from one of the hottest new authors in the industry.



## THE STEAMPUNK USER'S MANUAL: AN ILLUSTRATED PRACTICAL AND WHIMSICAL GUIDE TO CREATING RETRO-FUTURIST DREAMS (Bk.1)

AUTHOR: J. VANDERMEER & D. BOSKOVICH  
PUBLISHER: ABRAMS IMAGE  
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 1ST

This beautifully illustrated guide promises to be a companion and update to The Steampunk Bible. A how-to on all things steampunk, from fashion to music to gluing cogs on things at random, it hopes to become an essential guide for all the cogheads out there.



## STAR WARS: A NEW DAWN

AUTHOR: JOHN JACKSON MILLER  
PUBLISHER: CENTURY  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 25TH

With the slate wiped sort-of clean when it comes to all-things Star Wars, it's an exciting time to be a fan of the Star Wars books. A New Dawn is set in the years leading up to the original Star Wars movie and follows the fate of Kanan, a Jedi survivor of Order 66. Hanging on to his lightsabre but keeping his head down, Kanan gets drawn into events that could change the entire galaxy. If this sounds like it's a tie-in for Star Wars: Rebels, that's because it is.



## THE SECRETS OF BLOOD AND BONE

AUTHOR: REBECCA ALEXANDER  
PUBLISHER: DEL REY  
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 9TH

The keenly anticipated sequel to The Secrets of Life and Death, this new novel is split across time. In the past we have occultist Edward Kelley desperately fighting for his soul, and in the modern day we discover that Jackdaw Hammond's fate is still intertwined with events from the distant past. Both must face their demons in order to survive, both figuratively and literally.

# BOOK WORMHOLE

A MONTHLY PICK  
OF GENRE FICTION  
BY KATE FATHERS

## Le Horla

GUY DE MAUPASSANT

The thing about writing is that it's never objective...

The writer sinks their soul into their piece, regardless of length or character or genre. There's always an idea they're exploring, a character however small that speaks for them, and that's probably why literature has been so lasting; because even when it's about dragons or robots or alien kings there's a familiar humanity to hold on to. Guy de

Maupassant is such a writer.

*The Horla* (well, the third and longest version) was first published in 1887 and is one of Maupassant's few forays into genre fiction. It concerns an unnamed narrator who finds himself slowly starting to sicken. First it's just a fever, then insomnia and anxiety, but then it feels like there's a presence

in the room while he sleeps, a figure that he can't see. Is he going mad, or is there really a creature in his house, slowly torturing him to death?

One of the things I love about this novella is how perfect the psychology is, which is in large part due to what Maupassant was going through at the time. Maupassant contracted syphilis in his twenties, and continued to suffer from its mental and physical effects until he was institutionalised in 1891 following a suicide attempt. He died two years later at the age of forty-two. It's then not too outrageous to say that the suffering of the narrator mirrors the suffering Maupassant was experiencing, or that the *Horla* itself—an invisible creature the narrator struggles to understand and fight against—is an embodiment of mental illness. For Maupassant and the narrator (and probably many others) the *Horla* isn't just the avatar of mental illness; it's an honest representation of how the illness feels: like an external force, a creature to be defeated and something you might be able to physically escape.

As a horror story, *The Horla* is really effective one. It's the classic paradigm: one man's struggle with the unknown, be it an elusive villain or a supernatural force. Horror is at its best when what's horrifying is largely left to our imaginations (which is why the Saw series doesn't work for me), and when our fear comes not only through the reactions of the characters but from the anticipation of what might be. The terror the *Horla* inflicts is incredibly vivid and moving; while the *Horla* does represent a psychological terror, both in how it mentally affects the narrator and in its relationship to the author, it is also a supernatural fear. Humans are wired to have a healthy fear of the unknown (it's how we've survived so long), and there is nothing more unknown than the supernatural. Ignorance

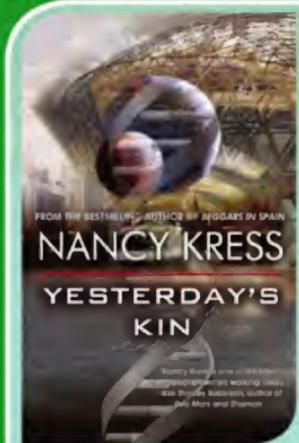
of what we don't understand, and in what is different from us, can also breed fear, and Maupassant takes it to another level by imagining the *Horla* as something vastly different from humanity: something invisible, something whose body has strange needs, and something whose nature is completely destructive. The *Horla* is the ultimate "other", standing in direct contrast to the narrator and ultimately aiming to do what the narrator fears most: to overtake him.

As I mentioned earlier, this version of *The Horla* is actually the third that Maupassant wrote, as well as the longest and the only one where the entire encounter with the *Horla* is written as the narrator lives it. The second version was published in 1886, is the second longest, and has the narrator in an asylum telling his story to a Dr Marrande and his colleagues. The third and shortest version, titled *Letter from a Madman*, was published in 1885, and is simply a letter from the narrator to his doctor. Of the three, the 1887 version is the most successful, the change in perspective and length both enabling the story to be much more chilling and a better vehicle for Maupassant's psychology. If I have one complaint, it's that it could have been a little bit longer in order to fully know the narrator and be immersed in his world. The two earlier versions are also guilty of telling rather than showing, probably due to the way the stories are told, but it does mean that I found them less absorbing than the final version, and less horrific. You can find all three in the Melville House Publishing edition, and they're well worth a read.

If you're looking for a short but intense piece of horror fiction, I can't recommend *The Horla* enough. Aside from a good story it is a fascinating, multi-layered look at mental illness and an in-depth look at Guy de Maupassant's life and mind. No matter which version you read, you won't be disappointed.

THE LATEST RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED

# REVIEWS



## YESTERDAY'S KIN

AUTHOR: NANCY KRESS / PUBLISHER: TACHYON /  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 9TH

After discovering an ancient mitochondrial subgroup, geneticist Marianne Jenner is whisked off to New York City with an assortment of the international science community's greatest minds to meet the

aliens who arrived there several months ago and only just revealed the purpose of their visit. An interstellar cloud of viral spores is heading towards the Earth, and unless a vaccine can be developed in the few months before its arrival, everyone on the planet will die.

Hard sci-fi is defined by its focus on the science aspect of the genre as much as the fiction, and as the science is such an integral part of Yesterday's Kin the book approaches industrial diamond durability. The inherent problem of explaining the numerous biology and virology concepts to the reader without sloppy "as you know" declarations is neatly sidestepped by the relevant information being imparted "for the benefit of the astronomers" during several group meetings recounting the frustratingly slow pace of the virus research.

The story perspective alternates between Marianne's work in the alien ship and suspicions of their hidden agenda, and that of her youngest son Noah, who from his feelings of isolation and lack of purpose is addicted to a drug that grants its users a temporary change in personality. From these two viewpoints we see the desperate search for a vaccine to the virus and exploration of the aliens' culture along with its juxtaposition to humanity that comments on the state of our own existence. Marianne's two other children, border guard Elizabeth and botanist Ryan, are representative of the diametric extremes

of the US populace's opinions on foreign policy, respectively cloistered isolationism or inclusive internationalism, and provide mutual counterpoints to arguments of how we can best develop as both a society and a species.

Although we are told of events in the world outside the ship and reactions to the encroaching apocalypse such as paranoia, rioting, terrorism, suicides and religious leaders declaring "told you so", they largely occur during the timeskips between chapters and are recounted after the fact, as though their separation from the main plot renders them tertiary considerations.

Several twists and turns permeate the story such as the early revelation of the aliens' origins and also exactly why the presence of a talented but unremarkable geneticist was requested along with all the biologists and virologists who could actually contribute to the production of a vaccine and the astronomers and physicists who could chart the cloud's progress.

Yesterday's Kin is a very short book, and while its plot is recounted with deft efficiency and its primary goal of stimulating consideration of what it truly means to be human is attained, you can't help but feel some expansion of its events and themes would have given it greater substance.

ANDREW MARSHALL

+++++ 7



## THE CLOWN SERVICE

AUTHOR: GUY ADAMS / PUBLISHER:  
DEL REY / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Possibly the greatest compliment we can pay Guy Adams is that this '40s-style spy novel set in the modern day reads like it was penned by a different Adams altogether. This is the spy thriller that Douglas Adams never wrote.

This book follows the misadventures of Toby Greene, a slightly incompetent spy who is transferred to Section 37. This is a section of the British Intelligence Service dedicated to fending off the paranormal. Fortunately, Greene spends just about the right amount of time not accepting this before realising what kind of novel he's in and rolling with the punches. From there, it features time travel, astral projection (which leads to some very intriguing ideas) and a

well-done zombie apocalypse.

The novel is not, strictly speaking, a comic spy story that features farcical situations played for laughs (that would be rather straying into Austin Powers territory). No, what makes it funny is the way Adams has with expressions, like the pub carpet that's on 40 cigarettes a day or how the word 'hello' is transformed into 'a useless, incomprehensible thing fat with vowels' under the influence of alcohol. These and more just tickled us and lend an air of truth to a book in a genre renowned for its lies and, as we mentioned earlier, means that the book appropriately reads like the author is channelling Douglas Adams.

The book ends with

something of a sequel hook (that's not surprising because there is one coming soon), which is fine by us. We're more than happy to read more adventures featuring this weird lot.

In the interview featured in the back of the paperback edition, Adams speaks of writing, how each book is a mad rush to the finish line and of being 'quiet, sullen and convinced it's all rubbish'. We hope that despite feeling that way during the writing process, he's now proud of the finished product. He certainly should be, it's hilariously and well worth your time.

SCOTT VARNHAM

+++++ 9



**JOSS WHEDON: GEEK KING OF THE UNIVERSE - A BIOGRAPHY**  
AUTHOR: AMY PASCALE / PUBLISHER: AURUM BOOKS / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

We're surely all in agreement that Joss Whedon is the most extraordinary and visionary storyteller of his generation. The man's a unique and tireless talent who has created a string of classic TV shows which have redefined the genre and reshaped forever the way stories are told on television. His work, through writing and directing the first Avengers movie, took him up to the next level and 2015's sequel, *Age of Ultron*, is already beyond highly anticipated. He's on top of the world... but getting there has been one hell of a journey – and it hasn't always been an easy one.

Amy Pascale's exhaustive, fabulously readable biography takes us through

Whedon's liberal childhood with his artistic, free-thinking parents, his time as a shy, imaginative student at Winchester College in Hampshire (UK) and his faltering steps as a scriptwriter for a number of long-forgotten American sitcoms (and a stint on the legendary *Roseanne*). His early professional years are studded with glorious successes and soul-destroying failures; he worked regularly 'punching up' dialogue in struggling scripts such as *Toys Story* and *Speed* and he was devastated to see his work on *Alien: Resurrection* torn apart by an unsympathetic director. His film script for *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was compromised by a creative team who saw his Slayer's exploits as broad and comedic rather than dark and genre-defying. Years later of course, he was to get the chance to bring his vision of *Buffy* to the screen in a TV series which rewrote all the rules...

But for all his cult successes – *Buffy*, its spin-off *Angel*, the short-lived space western sci-fi *Firefly* – and all the industry acclaim and recognition they delivered; Whedon was still struggling to create a really big breakthrough hit. His shows tended to amble along on small US networks where their low ratings could be tolerated because they were expected; those which made it to the big networks were invariably scuppered by executives and bean-counters who didn't really understand what he was doing and why more people weren't watching.

It's a fascinating, exhilarating story of a prodigious talent who just won't give up because he's got too many stories to tell, and he'll tell them one way or another. Across one memorable eighteen-month period Whedon went from show-running three TV series for his *Mutant Enemy* production arm – *Buffy*, *Angel* and *Firefly* – to running none, his TV empire either coming to the end of its natural lifespan (*Buffy*, unexpectedly cancelled (*Angel*) or

snuffed out just as it was finding its real creative feet (*Firefly*). But Whedon just carries on telling stories, whether in comic book form or as spec scripts for horror movies and thrillers, most of which have never seen the light of day. His experiences writing an ultimately rejected script for *Wonder Woman* would surely have crushed a less determined/resilient writer.

Geek King of the Universe is largely a trawl through Joss Whedon's career, its glorious highs and dispiriting lows. It's works n't all stuff too; the book doesn't shy away from problems early in his career when he was an unpopular presence on set due to his boyish inexperience, tensions on set are regularly – if discreetly – referenced and perceived weaknesses in certain scripts and projects are never glossed over. This isn't a book written with pure awe of Joss Whedon, it's a book which clearly wants to look at the man behind the myths and as such it explores his strengths and his weaknesses, his foibles and his idiosyncrasies. He's depicted as loyal to those he admires – mainly his devoted wife Kai Cole, their two children and the repertory company of actors who have populated his shows – but unflinchingly single-minded and ruthless when he needs to get the job done the way he knows it should be.

Amy Pascale has written a book which is almost unputdownable. It's not just the story of one incredible man, his imagination and his battles to bring his irresistible characters and stories to the screen; it's also a fascinating, cautionary and essential story for newcomers and industry wannabes wondering just how hard it is to make a name for yourself in the world of film and television. The answer seeps through every page of this wonderful book. It's this hard, all the time.

PAUL MOUNT

++++++ 10



**GRUDGEBEARER**  
AUTHOR: J.F. LEWIS  
PUBLISHER: PYR  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 2ND

One of the appeals of the fantasy genre is that it lends itself to world-building. Highly intricate settings are a common occurrence, but this can be a bit of a double-edged sword. Finely detailed worlds can often be inaccessible to casual readers and the harder one has to work to get immersed in a strange new place, the less likely it is that one will get any pleasure from the experience.

*Grudgебearer* falls into this trap almost straight away. The author can't resist drip-feeding this or that piece of cultural information as the story unfolds and a great deal of the first half of the book feels like exposition. By the time we get to the actual meat of the intrigue and adventure, the reader is already overloaded with everything

from the complex politics of this world to the courting and mating habits of the various races. Lewis' writing style is quite light and the story is actually well-paced, it's just that on every other page there appears to be a new strange and alien word/concept to contend with.

The set-up for the story is rather involved, making an already dense work even harder to navigate. Ancient creatures called the Eldrennai long ago created beings called the Aern to fend off the incredibly hard-to-kill creatures known as the Zaur. The Aern were originally bound through a mystical oath and made slaves, however they aren't anymore and a pact has been created. Wackiness ensues when an Eldrennai prince carelessly breaks this truce by messing with some

rather formidable suits of mystical armour.

There are some really nice touches; the main protagonist's concerns about his family are well done and the over-arching theme of what it means to be free and what battles are worth fighting are interesting. Sadly, the entire thing groans under overenthusiastic explanations of everything. If you like your fantasy slow, intricate and stuffed full of enough information to fill several RPG source books, then you will utterly adore this dense and painstakingly detailed world. Otherwise you may well give up before the story really gets started.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 5



## RESISTANCE

AUTHOR: SAMIT BASU  
PUBLISHER: TITAN BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Serving as a sequel to Turbulence, Resistance explores what follows when the world faces a growing number of meta-humans who are a law unto themselves. Set in 2020, a decade after a flight of passengers gained superpowers thanks to a random occurrence, the world has dramatically changed. Many superheroes are celebrities but humanity itself is losing ambition, seemingly resigned to be lorded over by super-beings. However, someone is killing off these meta-humans one by one, and they have a plan...

Serving as a deconstruction of the superhero genre as much as a celebration of its various

tropes, Resistance is a closer examination of the impact superheroes would have on reality. Despite the colourful science fiction elements present – with nods to super sentai series and kaiju films – there's a darkly cynical undertone. For everything weirdly wonderful the world offers, there is equally something darkly wrong and problematic which makes everyday life all the harder with every passing week.

Written in a format similar to light novels, it's a book that readers can easily breeze through at a rapid pace without anything seeming underdeveloped. Furthermore, its sense of scale with heroes traversing entire continents

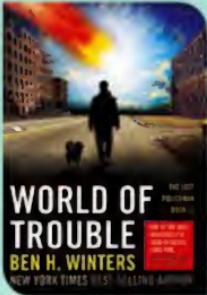
never fails to emphasise the weight of events. This said, the book isn't as smart as it thinks it is. A lot of this territory has been trodden before by the likes of Warren Ellis, Alan Moore, and Kurt Busiek; while its concepts are never pushed far enough to offer much more than comic readers have seen in Astro City.

Despite this, Resistance is nonetheless a great tale and entertaining from beginning to end. It offers something different from the usual yarn, and is well worth a look for any science fiction fan.

CALLUM SHEPHARD



6



## WORLD OF TROUBLE

AUTHOR: BEN H. WINTERS  
PUBLISHER: QUIRK BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following on from The Last Policeman and Countdown City, World of Trouble is the final instalment in Ben H. Winters' Edgar Award-winning Last Policeman trilogy.

With just two weeks until a giant asteroid collides with Earth, Hank Palace leaves the safety of the country home he's been sharing with a handful of other law enforcers and their families, and sets out to find his sister Nico, with a little help from Houdini the dog and his unlikely sidekick, Cortez. Along the way they meet a handful of people, all preparing for the end of the world in their own way, but as he slowly tracks Nico down there is no way that he could prepare himself for what he will find, and no way he can predict where he

will spend his final day.

After two emotional investigations with Hank you cannot help but tear into this novel, dying to know how it will all end but slowing in the final pages to make the most of it. Hank is the classic American cop and good guy, keeping to his word and sticking to the law. This finale is obviously a little bit more philosophical and heartfelt than the previous two novels as the main storyline is based around what is left of his family, Nico, and the small amount of time he has left to find her. As always, he has to throw himself into some tricky situations to discover the truth, leaving him beaten by a horse, locked in a barn, and tasered, although not shot this time. Full

of twists, turns and surprises it is hard to give any plot details without spoilers, but Hank is a great hero and World of Trouble really delivers the gripping story that you would be expecting after the previous excellent books. There are no easy ways out, happy endings or 'it was all a dream', Winters full-on faces his character's predicament with refreshing logic and realism.

The entire Last Policeman trilogy is excellent and World of Trouble is no exception. We can but hope Ben H. Winters has another character just as great coming in the future to replace the lovable Hank Palace.

CARA FIELDER



8



## HALF A KING

AUTHOR: JOE ABERCROMBIE  
PUBLISHER: DEL REY BOOKS  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Following a similar line of thought to George R. R. Martin's A Song of Ice and Fire, Half a King consists of a tale of betrayal, political manoeuvring, and war. Set in a world in which the more fantastical elements are kept to a bare minimum, it follows the journey of Prince Yarvi. Born a cripple and a weakling, Yarvi is forced to ascend to the throne upon the sudden loss of his father and favoured brother to lead their country in a time of war. Unsuitable for the role and with little support, it is not a task he relishes. One which is soon to be made all the more difficult by those who desire the Black Chair for themselves...

While it wears its influences on its sleeve, Joe Abercrombie's book nonetheless maintains its own identity and never stoops

to outright slavish imitation. With no mention of Others, wolves and less focus upon the politics of war, the book instead follows a single story – namely, Yarvi's efforts to survive following the tumultuous events which lead him to ascend to the throne. Unlike his brother, he is not a warrior, forcing him to utilise any means he can get in order to find his way back and take revenge.

Yarvi's quest brings him into contact with a multitude of different figures and is used to flesh out elements of the world as the book progresses. You're given enough details to want to keep reading but never enough to fully understand the world, a strength as this will keep you invested but it's also a failing as the book never quite provides

the answers you want. There are glimpses here of a truly fascinating world on par with the Twilight Reign series, but as this is Yarvi's series it's frustratingly never the complete focus of any scene.

Furthermore, while the book has a strong story it reads as if basics have been ignored. Abercrombie seems to have skipped any real introductions for the characters or setting, and the opening is extremely jarring.

Half a King has the beginnings of a great tale, but never goes quite far enough. Give it a look if you like the sound of the blurb, but don't expect anything perfect.

CALLUM SHEPHARD



4

# VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER

JOEL HARLEY PULLS  
MONITOR DUTY  
TO BRING YOU  
THE LATEST FROM  
THE WORLD OF  
COMICBOOKS



**G**reetings, salutations, hello and welcome to The Watchtower for this month's report of the view from within. It's been a tumultuous time since we last spoke, with at least a few of you having witnessed the news unfolding firsthand at San Diego Comic Con. Deadpool test footage (albeit featuring the revolting Ryan Reynolds), glimpses

of Wonder Woman and sneak peeks at a *Dark Knight Returns* inspired Battleck? Attendees of SDCC were certainly in for a treat this year. The jammy bastards.

It's always nice when the month's news ties together to fit a rough theme, and thankfully, that's what we get from the emerged stories from Marvel and, to a lesser extent, DC. That theme is change,

by the way, which Marvel are offering in spades. The biggest news this month is that two of its most popular Avengers and flagship characters (the ones that aren't Spider-Man or Wolverine) are soon to undergo a very drastic transformation each. First up is Thor, who is to become a woman this October. No longer worthy to wield Mjolnir, Thor is to lose the hammer and a brand new female hero will emerge, taking on both his name and his weapon. Writer Jason Aaron clarified, "this is not She-Thor. This is not Lady Thor. This is not Thorita. This is Thor." Just, you know, not the Thor played by Chris Hemsworth.

Fellow Avenger (the first one, actually) Captain America is also set to undergo a transformation of his own, as a de-powered Steve Rogers will hand over the mantle to chum Sam Wilson (most commonly known as Falcon, seen recently portrayed by Anthony Mackie in *The Winter Soldier*). As you might expect, message boards everywhere are afire, asking such pertinent questions like 'will Thoretta also be wearing a burka?' and 'did he get that operation on the NHS, the bloody Norse foreigner?' Those same people seem to forget/not notice/know that Thor was also once a frog (as in amphibian – not a racial slur) and Captain America has already quit the job several times in the past. They will be back – the best we can ask is that new Thor and Cap do the best they can in the meanwhile.



And hey, at least it gives the studios a neat alternative, once Hemsworth and Evans' contracts run out.

Such change carries over (albeit in a less drastic fashion) to the DC Universe, where a new look for one of its most popular characters has been unveiled. Batgirl is to get a snazzy new costume this October, trading in the skintight batsuit for something a little more practical. When a fire destroys Barbara's home, losing everything she owns, Batgirl is forced to re-evaluate her life. This gets her a detachable cape, leather jacket ("NOT spandex", shout the design notes) and kick-ass yellow Doc Martens. The creative team of Cameron Stewart, Brenden Fletcher and artist Babs Tarr promise something a little more fun than you'd expect from a Bat-headed story. Well, after the life she's led so far (tussles with the Joker and a long time spent in a wheelchair) poor Barbara deserves some fun.

**FUN! Like Batman '66.** Following Kevin Smith's Batman/Green Hornet crossover, the next series is to adapt Harlan Ellison's 'lost' Batman story (which I previously reported a few months ago), starring its own version of Two-Face. Would it be too much to hope for expecting an approximation of '60s era Clint Eastwood in the artwork? Possibly, but it'll be interesting to find out.

Another theme to arise this month is that of an increase in cult television and movie properties making their way to a comic book near you (including not one or two but three Star Wars titles from Marvel). Last month, I brought you news of an impending crossover between Quentin Tarantino's Django and masked avenger Zorro – well, the bizarre crossovers continue apace. Most intriguing is IDW and BOOM! Studios' *Star Trek/Planet of the Apes*, due later this year. Writer David Tipton explains, in the comic's – frankly bonkers – press



release: "with the Klingons secretly backing a renegade gorilla general in a coup for control of Ape City, Captain Kirk finds himself in the uncomfortable position of having to help out Dr. Zaius' orangutans." But of course. The title? *The Primate Directive*.

I'll just leave that hanging there, as nothing I can say could possibly do it justice. This comic sells itself – perhaps even beating *Star Trek/X-Men* in its audacity. They had me at "Klingons backing a renegade gorilla." If you thought that Marky Mark Wahlberg's almost-tryst with Helena Bonham Carter's ape in the *Planet of the Apes* remake was creepy, just wait until Kirk gets on the scene...

The left field crossovers keep on coming, with IDW announcing at SDCC the forthcoming release of *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles/Ghostbusters*.

"Putting the two together is a natural choice," said series editor Bobby Curnow, putting into words something few of us had been thinking. If you say so, Bobby. Still, for better or worse, it'll be great seeing what they come up with. Cowabunga, dude.

Slightly more obvious (from that perspective, anyway) is Gail Simone's SDCC announcement that she'll be responsible for handling Dynamite Comics' 'Women of Dynamite' crossover, which will see Red Sonja, Vampirella and Deja Thoris cross paths in an event expected to be 'huge.' Sadly, after the previous announcements, it seems a little old hat. We live in a day and age where everyone seems to be trading blows/quips with everyone else. Truly, this is the golden age of the comic book crossover.

In other cult news, we have the revival of several old but popular properties, with *Escape From New York*, *Hellraiser* and *Steed & Mrs. Peel* (aka *The Avengers* – but not those ones) titles all inbound from BOOM! later this year. With *Big Trouble in Little China* having already achieved its own sequel in comic book form, it's a good time to be a Kurt Russell character. Who knows, maybe they can all meet and form their own Kurt Russell version of *The Avengers*. Just don't ask Stuntman Mike drive.

On that glorious note, we pull shut the Watchtower curtains for another month, leaving us to compile our updated pull lists (I don't know about you, but *The Primate Directive* is top of the pile) and mull over the possibilities in our collective nerd mind eye. As ever, I can be contacted via the usual Twitter and e-mail handles...

...well, unless you've been to SDCC, in which case, you can keep it to yourself, jammy bastard.

*Joel Harley can be contacted at: joel.harley@starburstmagazine.com and tweeted @joelharley*



# REVIEWS

THE LATEST COMIC  
BOOK RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## KINGS WATCH: VOL 1

AUTHOR: JEFF PARKER / ARTIST: MARC LAMING / PUBLISHER: DYNAMITE ENTERTAINMENT /  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 9TH

Superheroes are currently in vogue and it's unsurprising that many old-school hero franchises are having the dust blown off them and are being relaunched and remastered. The sweet spot of course, would be a team of heroes with plenty of nostalgia attached to them. Kings Watch ticks this box quite firmly by being a book that puts The Phantom, Mandrake the Magician, Lothar and Flash Gordon into one story. Any child of the eighties

will remember these characters from TV show Defenders of the Earth and if you're a real fan, you're probably humming the theme song right now.

The set-up is a sprawling, globe-trotting sort of affair. We have Flash and Professor Zarkov working together on an experimental rocket-ship on one side of the world, with The Phantom and Lothar dealing with what appears to be an invasion of monsters in Africa.

Meanwhile, Mandrake is hunting down the Cult of the Cobra. On top of all that, spunky reporter Dale Arden is investigating dangerous phenomena all over the world as the weather goes crazy.

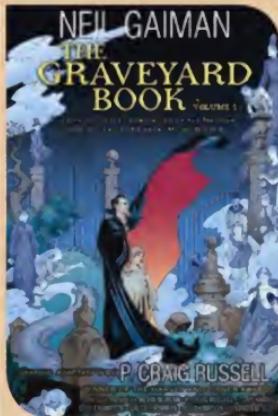
Parker uses the traditional action-adventure technique of throwing threat after threat at the heroes, rapidly expanding the world as he does so. All the villains you'd expect to see are here and though old school fans will see a lot of it coming a mile away, it's still thoroughly entertaining, with just enough shocks to keep the fans happy.

Mark Laming's artwork is pretty top-notch here. He goes to town with the alien worlds, spectacular looking rocket-ships, exotic animals and other cool things that you would expect from a story like this. The world of Kings Watch is filled with interesting things and Laming makes sure that each new scene is fresh and different. Character design is thoughtful and clever, with Flash looking every inch the wealthy athlete and The Phantom looking more like a rugged jungle hero rather than a dude in fetish gear. Overall, a nice little journey into nostalgia that happens to update an old franchise for a new audience, and with any luck this will do well enough to justify Flash and chums returning to the silver screen.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 8





## **THE GRAVEYARD BOOK: VOLUME 1**

AUTHOR: NEIL GAIMAN, P. CRAIG RUSSELL /  
ARTIST: VARIOUS / PUBLISHER: BLOOMSBURY /  
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

Nobody Owens grows up in a graveyard full of ghosts, ghouls, a witch, a werewolf and a very tall man, neither

alive nor dead, in a very long black cloak. The Graveyard Book is classic Neil Gaiman, all right. Originally released as a young adult's novel in 2008, this fantastic fable returns to bookshelves this summer in the form of a two-part graphic novel, adapted by P. Craig Russell and illustrated by a number of artists, each in their own distinctive styles.

After almost entire families are murdered by a mysterious figure known as Jack, the surviving toddler pegs it to a derelict graveyard where he is taken in by the ghostly inhabitants. This first volume sees Nobody (Bob for short) growing up in this weird and wonderful world and going on a series of adventures. He finds ancient treasure in the tomb of a Celtic warrior; he becomes the captive of ghouls on a trip to Hell and back; he goes on a quest to find a headstone for an unjustly murdered witch and he dances the danse-macabre. Meanwhile, the aforementioned Jack is on the hunt for his escaped victim.

Gaiman is one of the most acclaimed writers working in fantasy today and it's not hard to see why. Masterfully weaving together influences from history, myth and fantasy, his stories capture a childishly adventurous spirit – spooky but not terrifying and dark but not gory. His dialogue is poetic, evocative, and even when coming from the weirdest

of characters, it has a truthfulness of emotion that keeps the reader absorbed. While lacking the complexity present in Gaiman's more adult work, these stories are light, addictive reading and will leave the reader itching for volume two.

With an expert knowledge of the format, Russell has done a superb job with the adaptation, remaining faithful to Gaiman's prose and yet always finding the perfect way to cut it down and foreground the visuals. All the artists turn beautiful words into haunting imagery, bringing to life the winding paths, cracked tombstones, and gothic crypts of the graveyard, as well as its assortment of inhabitants. If there's one weak link, it's that Tony Harris' artwork on chapter three feels out of sync with the others; the overly bold inks jar the subtle tones found throughout the rest of the book.

All in all, this is an excellent volume for young and old adults alike, whether you're entirely new to the story or a Gaiman devotee who's read the novel over and over again. Simultaneously a childlike adventure, a fantastic fairytale and a haunting horror, *The Graveyard Book* will make you think twice about what lies beyond the fences of that old cemetery down the road.

KIERON MOORE

+++++ 9



## **THE FLASH VOLUME 4: REVERSE**

AUTHOR: BRIAN BUCCELATO / ARTIST: FRANCIS MANAPUL / PUBLISHER: DC / RELEASE DATE: AUGUST 24TH

The Flash has always been a bit of a fan favourite. The combination of an interesting power set, a well thought out supporting cast and a fun (and often funny) central protagonist has always served the fastest man alive well, and The Flash has survived the recent continuity reset with all the things that make geeks love him. Thanks to the reboot, this is the Barry Allen version of The Flash, though this take on the character is an interesting blend of various versions. This incarnation of Barry is warmer and more interesting, and has a sense of humour that seemed missing from previous incarnations of the hero.

The plot is pretty straightforward: a mysterious power is killing off anyone who taps the speed force, the source of The Flash's abilities. This gives the narrative an excuse to have The Flash race Kid Flash. Hyper-speed races are one of the reasons we read the book in the first place and this speed duel makes up the centrepiece of the work. It's fun and clever and exactly the sort of thing regular readers demand.

Buccellato is clearly having a lot of fun managing the expectations of established fans. Those who know The Flash of old will have opinions on exactly what a speed force predator should look like as well as thoughts on how Barry's love-life changes him. Francis Manapul's art is very pretty indeed; there's enough subtlety here to give the reader hints as to what the future holds in store, story-wise whilst still

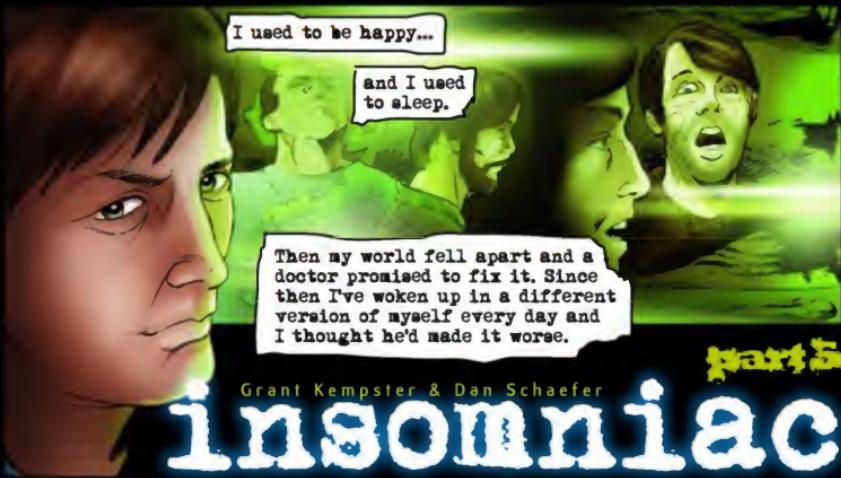
being clear and engaging art. Combined with Buccellato's teasing and playful storytelling style, we get a great blend of Flash goodness.

The book is let down by a lack of pacing, it bunches up at points, making the story stop to catch its breath rather than gathering speed until it hits the finish line. Unlike other DC books in the same series, however, it doesn't try too hard to be something new, it sticks to the formula that made it classic in the first place and it does this very well.

ED FORTUNE

+++++ 7





part 5

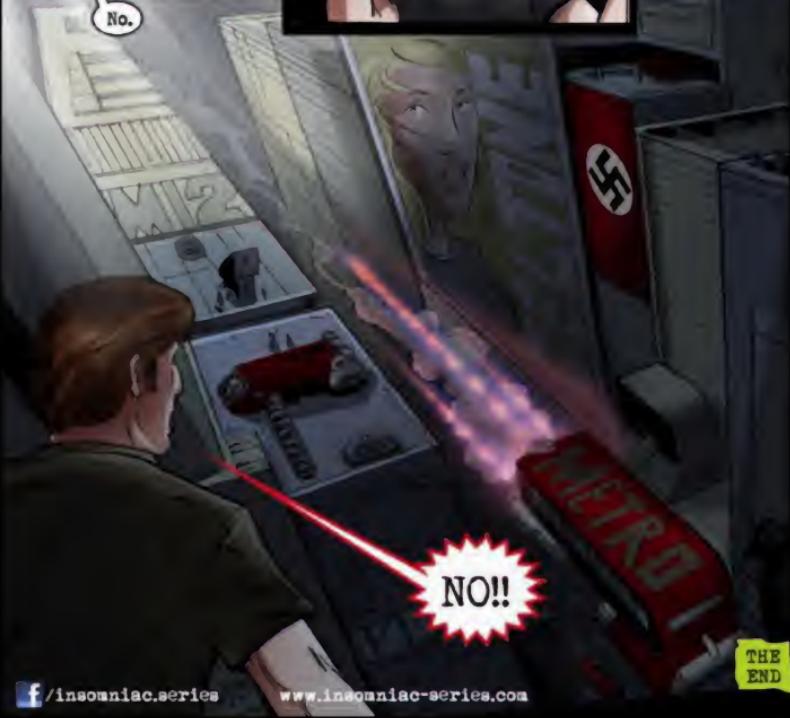
Grant Kempster & Dan Schaefer

# insomniac





# VIEW FROM THE WATCHTOWER



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THE  
END

NEWS AND PREVIEWS  
IN GAMING  
BY LEE PRICE

# PIXEL JUICE



## TEKKEN X STREET FIGHTER Still in the Works

Remember when Namco and Capcom teamed up to create a couple of crossovers that would see the *Tekken* characters moved into a *Street Fighter* engine and vice-versa? Apparently so does series producer Katsuhiro Harada, who has assured fans that the *Tekken* side of the crossover is still in production, despite two years having passed since *Street Fighter X Tekken* was released.

*Street Fighter X Tekken* was a superb fighting game that managed to succeed in bringing a traditionally 3D cast into the 2D realm. Will the alternative game be as successful at transferring the *Street Fighter* cast into a dimension where they have always been pretty poor? The EX games showed *Street Fighter* traditionally struggles in 3D but that was a long time ago and we can't help but be interested in how this one pans out.

## WALKING DEAD: SEASON 3 is Coming

Another season of Telltales superb *Walking Dead* adventure games has been announced at Comic-Con, which will be great news for fans that are still digging their teeth into the second season.

Few details have been announced, with gamers likely having to wait until the conclusion of the current story arc, which is following Clementine.

## COMING SOON



## ALIEN: ISOLATION

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE  
RELEASE DATE: OCTOBER 7TH

*Following the slight disappointment that was Aliens: Colonial Marines, the Creative Assembly have taken over development duties for the upcoming Isolation. Set 15 years after the events of the first film, Isolation sees characters take control of Amanda Ripley as she searches for her mother, the infamous Ellen. Creative Assembly are claiming that the game will be much more survival horror than action, as implied by the association with the first film. Will it join classics like Alien 3 and Alien Trilogy in doing the gaming franchise proud? Only time will tell.*

## COMING SOON



## SHADOW WARRIOR

PLATFORM: XBOX ONE  
RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 23RD

A first-person shooter that originally debuted on the PC last year, *Shadow Warrior* sees the player take control of a modern day ninja/mercenary as he looks to demolish a whole bunch of demonic baddies. Using everything from guns through to shurikens and katanas, our hero cuts a swathe through a horde of monsters. Touted as a modern day throwback to older PC shooters, *Shadow Warrior* received a positive reception on the PC so may well be worth checking out.

## Naughty Dog Considering THE LAST OF US Sequel

In news to get very excited about, it appears that Naughty Dog is currently examining the possibility of a sequel to *The Last of Us*.

In an interview with VideoGamer Arne Meyer commented, "I think we always make a smart decision in that all of our games are self-contained stories so they don't have to continue if we don't want them to or if there's no reason for them to continue. It really comes down to is there something interesting in this universe we've created that we want to continue to explore? Is it something that we can get the entire team passionate about? Is it something we can get the creative directors excited about and then we could continue it? We're just starting to explore ideas of what more could there be in this universe and starting that decision process. That doesn't mean the end result is guaranteed."

Take note Activision and Ubisoft. This is how sequels should be done. If there's a story worth telling and the resulting game can do the original justice then that is more than enough reason for a sequel. Alternatively, if the guys at Naughty Dog decide that they have nothing left for the series, we will be more than happy for them to explore new ideas and hopefully grace us with something as awesome as *The Last of Us* or *Uncharted* again.

## COMING SOON



### AR NOSURGE: ODE TO AN UNBORN STAR

PLATFORM: PS3

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 23RD

Another month, another JRPG that has been available in Japan for a while. *Ar Nosurge* is the follow-up to *Ciel Nosurge* and sees players follow the story of two separate pairs of characters as they hunt for a song that has apparently caused all machines in their world to go haywire. In true JRPG fashion, this evolves into a lengthy story that sees our heroes questing to find out the truth about the world they inhabit. A niche title, but one that may be of interest to genre fans.

### DRAGON AGE: INQUISITION Delayed

The hotly anticipated new game in BioWare's *Dragon Age* series has been delayed until November to ensure that the best possible experience is offered to gamers.

Executive producer Mark Darrah commented, "Since we began working on *Dragon Age: Inquisition* almost four years ago, our goal was to create the best *Dragon Age* experience ever; it was that goal that motivated many of our decisions: moving to Frostbite, bringing race choice and customization back, improving tactical camera, building a team of characters whose relationships evolve based on your actions, and most importantly, crafting an epic, nation-spanning story that both draws upon past games and takes you to many new places in the realm of Thedas."

This last bit of time is about polishing the experience we want you to see. Ensuring that our open spaces are as engaging as possible. Strengthening the emotional impact of the Hero's choices. And ensuring the experience you get is the best it can be in the platform you choose to play on."

This is the sort of delay that we can get behind, as it appears to be all for a good cause. Plus we are sure that BioWare and EA will be more than happy to miss the busy early-autumn period that traditionally sees a slew of Triple-A titles being released.



### Good Old Games Accidentally Gives Away Free Games and Lets Users Keep Them

Good Old Games ([gog.com](http://gog.com)) is one of the best gaming portals around. It really is as simple as that. Of course, if you need any more evidence of the company's greatness look no further than the recent story that saw them allow a bunch of users to keep games they had gotten for free as a result of a technical glitch.

The company had been running a Linux promotion to raise awareness of its newly developed support for the platform, with users being offered a discount on a range of titles. Due to the glitch this discount ended up being more than GOG had bargained for, as the company wound up giving away a bunch of free titles.

Eventually a forum thread sprang up hosted by a user who felt guilty about getting his hands on 21 free games, prompting the following response from GOG: "Thank you for your honesty. Yesterday, due to a small glitch on our end, you and a bunch of other lucky people ended up getting games from the Linux Launch promo for free. Don't worry, though, as it's totally cool with us and you may keep them. Yes, we will not be removing these titles from your account and we do hope you will enjoy them!"

The spokesperson continued, "Of course, if you prefer, like some of our community members, we can always remove [the free games] from your shelf - just let us know

replying to this email. Again, there's no problem if you want to keep them!"

Class act all round from GOG. We reckon anyone reading this should do their bit to support the company and its work in making older titles accessible on current PCs. Grab yourself a copy of *Fallout* and then have a real explore around their library.

### BioWare Releases MASS EFFECT 4 Survey

BioWare are having a busy couple of months with the delayed *Dragon Age: Inquisition* nearing completion and the *Mass Effect* series starting to show signs of life again. *Mass Effect 4* is coming, at some point, and the guys at BioWare want fans to contribute to the game by completing a survey that discusses their gaming habits and what they look for in a game.

Producer Michael Gamble called for players to, "Help us make the next *Mass Effect* game the best one yet. I'd appreciate it if you folks did this short survey."

The survey itself can be found at [www.surveymonkey.com/s/69HFZTS](http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/69HFZTS) and seems like some pretty basic market research. Still, it's interesting to see BioWare being open to speaking to potential customers about the direction of the series, especially after the reaction of the original ending to *Mass Effect 3* received.

Will it all help the fourth title, which will follow a completely different storyline to the first three, become a better game? Only time will tell.

## COMING SOON



### DISNEY INFINITY: MARVEL SUPER HEROES

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 23RD

*Disney* struck gold with *Infinity* a while back. The game was essentially a sandbox that allowed for the player to construct stories using their favourite Disney characters, whilst allowing Disney to charge a whole bunch of money for extra add-on features. It's a good formula and one that *Disney* will be more than happy to replicate with the *Marvel* version of the game. Look for a ton of characters and potential stories. Perhaps we may even see some crossover between the two universes.



## FIREFLY Cast to Reunite for Online Game

Great news for fans of *Firefly*. The rumours that the much-loved and criminally cut short series is going to receive a new lease of life as an online game were fully confirmed at Comic-Con. Better still, the entire cast of the series will be taking part and offering voice services, with Alan Tudyk set to play multiple roles.

Infamous crime boss Niska is also set to appear and, according to what little has been released about the title, he is supposedly hiring. We can't wait to see how this one develops.

## Crytek Addresses Financial Concerns

Another month, another developer inching closer to the scrapheap. This time it's the turn of Crytek, who have been forced to issue a statement discussing their current financial situation following weeks of rumour and the departure of a number of key staff.

The result was the company admitting that it is in a "transitional

## COMING SOON



### MIDDLE-EARTH: SHADOW OF MORDOR

PLATFORM: MULTIPLE

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 30TH

*Now this is one to get excited about. Shadow of Mordor is an action-RPG that is obviously going to be set in Tolkien's fantasy land. The game will bridge the gap between The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, with players taking control of a ranger named Talion as he heads into Mordor to exact revenge for the slaughter of his family. The game doesn't stick to the established canon, but Warner Bros. are claiming that everything aligns. Could be exciting... or could be one to get the fans up in arms.*

phase" whatever that means, and that it has pretty much utterly failed to communicate what is happening to the company to its employees.

Apparently the issue was that the company was looking to secure additional capital to continue operations. The statement read, "In recent weeks, there

have been repeated reports and rumors relating to financial problems at Crytek. Having already given an update to staff across all our studios, we are now in a position to share more details with members of the press and public. Crytek has been in a transitional phase. Our evolution from a development studio to an Online-Publisher has required us to refocus our strategies. These challenges go along with an increased demand for capital which we have secured."

Hopefully, the issue is now resolved and the company will march on without any further problems. Something tells us that this is unlikely, however.

## COMING SOON



### FALLING SKIES: THE GAME

PLATFORM: PS3, 360, Wii U

RELEASE DATE: SEPTEMBER 23RD

Based on the Spielberg-produced post-apocalyptic drama of the same name, *Falling Skies* aims to emulate the positive reception that the series has garnered thus far by offering up a juicy slice of strategic gaming. The player is tasked with commanding a group of survivors as they attempt to save the planet in the aftermath of an alien attack. There isn't a whole lot else known about the game but it should certainly be one for fans of the series.

## ATM Hacked to Play DOOM

Now this is the sort of story we like, simply because it is equal parts brilliant and pointless. Some smartarse Aussies have decided to take it upon themselves to hack an ATM machine so that it can play *Doom*.

Taking advantage of the fact that the ATM uses a Windows-based software, combined with a bit of tech wizardry, an almost fully-working version of the game is now playing on the ATM.

Buttons are currently being mapped to the number pad of the ATM and the developers have a slightly loftier goal of getting the machine to print receipts whenever a level is completed.

Unfortunately, it isn't a public terminal (it would have made transactions a hell of a lot more interesting if it was) but a video of the machine is available on YouTube for people who are interested in having a look.

# REVIEWS

THE LATEST  
GAMING RELEASES  
REVIEWED AND RATED



## GODS WILL BE WATCHING

DEVELOPER: DECONSTRUCTTEAM / PUBLISHER: DEVOLVER DIGITAL / PLATFORMS: PC, OS X, LINUX, iOS, ANDROID / RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW

*"By the sixth day only myself and the soldier were left. The bandits had taken the life of the doctor, and what little ammunition we had. Food is gone, and with it what little remains of our sanity. The radio is dead. Everyone is dead. We failed."*

Looking like something spawned on an especially dark day at LucasArts in the '90s, Gods Will Be Watching is a game of failure. In this grim survival sim, you play a leader of a group of colourful characters and try to bring out everyone alive, only to watch your comrades picked off one by one as everything goes to hell. Some scenarios have you commanding a marooned starship crew; in others you play as freedom fighters

trying to maintain a hostage situation.

With a maximum of five actions per day, you have to choose between basic necessities and keeping your allies alive/sane. With every failing, morale will be shaken and with every turn delirium will set in. By the end you will only win by the skin of your teeth. The very act of trying to speak to someone, just to learn their thoughts and keep them sane wastes valuable time. Even killing your allies is a move you sometimes need to take, either as an act of mercy or if they are too close to fleeing and taking others with them.

Unfortunately, for all this genius, Gods Will Be Watching's greatest failing is that it

doesn't get why high risk games such as Dark Souls work. Everything here is set up to ensure it will take countless replays, much effort and concentrated focus to finally reach completion. However, unlike FTL: Faster Than Light, far too often key elements boil down to random chance. Rather than allowing the player to retain a moderate degree of control and the ability to manage risks, far too many variables and choices are a blind gamble.

Those which are not based upon sheer good fortune come down to trial and error. How close a person is to breaking point isn't judged by any measurable stat, and even the animation showing they are getting twitchy is frequently unreliable. A number of chapters feature rapidly moving goalposts or randomised elements; problems which only enhance the issue of the game being incredibly luck-based rather than allowing for skill to overcome situations.

If you are after a game where slow methodical planning will allow you to overcome staggering odds, Gods Will Be Watching is not the game for you. For all its promise, it proves to be a sad disappointment which cannot unlock its full potential. Skip this one and save your money for something else.

CALLUM SHEPHERD

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4

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# RETRO BYTES

A LOOK BACK AT  
THE WORLD OF  
RETRO GAMING  
BY CHRIS JACKSON



## LEARNING THE ROPES PART 2

Last month we looked at the early days of wrestling games, and we came to the conclusion that most of them really weren't very good. Luckily, things started to improve when more powerful consoles arrived, and continued to get better right up to the present day. We're not going to go through every single wrestling game ever made (we'd need an entire issue if we were going to do that) but there's still a lot to get through so let's get on with it!

Starting with the major wrestling companies then, it took the WWF a while to get going in the 16-bit era. 1994's *WWF Raw* was probably their best effort, taking the best bits from previous games (not that there were too many of those...) and adding a few extra bells and whistles. Each wrestler finally had their own unique moves, and every character felt different due to their movements being based on individual attributes. Also, players were now able to pull off a ridiculously over-the-top "Mega Move" that might launch their opponent miles up into the air or punch them so hard they'd go flying out of the ring. Overall, the total package is much less repetitive than the WWF's other offerings from the time. With plenty of recognisable characters and easy-to-master controls, it might be a good place

for newcomers to start.

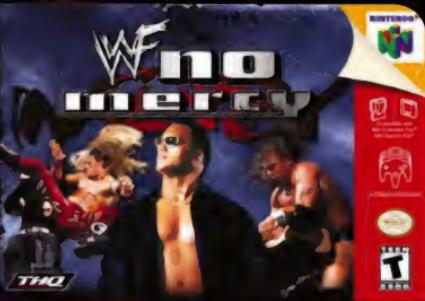
Also from 1994, *WCW SuperBrawl Wrestling* is completely unremarkable with its lack of music, cheap AI, and out-dated roster (two years in development meant that most of the wrestlers in the game had long since left WCW by the time the game was released), but it does have one saving grace: the animated character selection screen. While you're deciding which character you want to control, each member of the roster takes it in turns to pop out of his little box on the screen to pose manically and shout some sort of taunt at you. The longer you look at it, the funnier it gets. It might not seem like much, but at least they tried.

*WrestleMania: The Arcade Game* changed things up a bit in 1995. Players have to fight through a series of one-on-one, one-on-two and later one-on-three matches in a bid to win one of two championships. Developers Midway

went all-out silly on this one, putting an emphasis on *Mortal Kombat*-style button combinations to pull off some pretty ludicrous special moves. Doink the Clown could give opponents an electric shock using a buzzer concealed in his hand, The Undertaker was able to smash tombstones over people's heads, and "The Beast From The East" Bam Bam Bigelow possessed a variety of fire attacks. And let's not forget the blood! There was none. Instead though, characters would "bleed" objects from their body. Gold chains and razor blades poured out of Razor Ramon, Yokozuna dropped his dinner (not as horrifying as it sounds), and Bret Hart bled... well... hearts. Like we said, it's really stupid but quite amusing at the same time.

*WCW Vs The World* on the PS1 featured a huge roster of 51 playable characters including a selection of WCW headliners as well as "fictionalised" versions of real-world international stars whose actual likenesses couldn't be officially included due to copyright restrictions. Later released in Japan as "Virtual Pro Wrestling", with versions of subsequent WCW and WWF titles also being ported to the East as part of the same series (with foreign wrestlers' likenesses intact this time), this was one of the first wrestling games to make the leap from 2D to 3D, really helping it to stand out from anything that had been seen before. The gameplay doesn't really hold up too well today but it's worth checking out for curiosity's sake.

*WWF No Mercy* on the N64 is regarded by many as one of the best wrestling games of all time, and it's really the first wrestling game that brought us many of the features that we expect to see in modern titles. New additions included customisable characters and move sets, a huge story mode with branching narratives



depending on whether you win or lose matches, an extensive "create a wrestler" mode, and the ability to purchase new moves, clothes and wrestlers by spending money earned by winning matches. All this and one of the best grappling systems ever created make No Mercy a winner.

Before we move on to the best of the rest, we need to give a quick mention to *Smackdown: Here Comes the Pain* on the PS2. This is a great place to see where the current style of WWE games really started, featuring controls that will be familiar to today's fans as well as a huge roster, career and create modes, and wide variety of match types that can truly keep you going for ages. Ever fancied smashing your way through a window on a balcony in an arena lobby and then piledriving someone all the way down to the floor? Or using a forklift truck to drop a crate onto someone's head? HCTP made it possible, and it was absolutely glorious.

Oh, should we mention *WWE Crush Hour?* Vince McMahon has kitted the WWE crew out with customised cars fitted with guns and weapons, and created a demolition derby-style TV show where the only aim is to blow everyone else up. It's a thing that exists. Yeah.

Moving away from all this nonsense, just like in real life there was plenty going on in the world of wrestling games outside of the WWF/E. Dating back to 1992, Japan's *Fire Pro Wrestling* series is possibly the greatest collection of wrestling games ever made. The language barrier might cause too many problems for a lot of people, but fortunately a few titles did make their way to the West.

Featuring fictional characters based on real-life wrestlers (those sodding licensing laws again), *Fire Pro* placed an emphasis on timing and weaning down your opponent in order to pull off bigger moves to cause more damage. Known for its strategic gameplay, gigantic variety of moves and match types, as well as its insanely deep customisation mode, *Fire Pro* is truly one of the greats. PS2 owners should seek out *Fire Pro Wrestling Returns* for one of the best examples of the series (which includes an exploding barbed



wire deathmatch mode on top of all its other features), or you can hunt around online to find an English fan translation of the classic SNES *Super Fire Pro Wrestling X Premium* or the all-female "Queen's Special" edition. *Fire Pro*'s later years saw it end up as the incredible 3D *King of Colosseum 2*, but again this was a Japanese-only release. *KoC2* is a truly outstanding game, but even if you've got the right technology to play it, unfortunately the huge amount of text menus still get in the way a bit too much for us to be able to completely recommend it.

It's a bit of a spoiler, but seeing as not many people are going to dig it out let's tell you an interesting fact. It's about time we had one of those, really. The first game worked on by gaming cult hero Goichi Suda (AKA Suda 51) was *Super Fire Pro Wrestling 3: Final Bout*. He also worked on its sequel, in which your wrestler commits suicide at the end when he realises the only reason he was wrestling was to fight off his chronic depression. Didn't see that one coming, did you?!

Here are a few curiosities to finish with then. *Hammerlock Wrestling* (1994) splits the screen into three horizontal sections (two during close-ups), with the match

playing out in the middle and close-up stills of the action appearing across the top and bottom. Capcom's *Saturday Night Slam Masters* (1993) is another arcade-style beat 'em up which includes Haggar from *Final Fight* as a playable character. Konami went one better with *Jikkyou Power Pro Wrestling '96: Max Voltage* where many of the wrestlers are based on characters from their most well-known games such as *Contra*, *Castlevania*, and *Parodius*.

And then there's *Onita Atsushi: FMW* on the SNES, based on Japan's hardcore Frontier Martial-Arts Wrestling promotion. A 2D beat 'em up with added wrestling moves, each stage has its own hazards like land mines or jets of fire that you can throw your opponent into for major damage. Matches in the real FMW were often superviolent so it's fitting that the game adds some over the top carnage to the beat 'em up format, but with only four wrestlers to choose from it can get old rather quickly. As a bonus, beating the game unlocks Megumi Kudo as a playable character in a deathmatch against her real-life nemesis Combat Toyoda. Seriously, look up some of their matches on YouTube. You'll shit yourself.

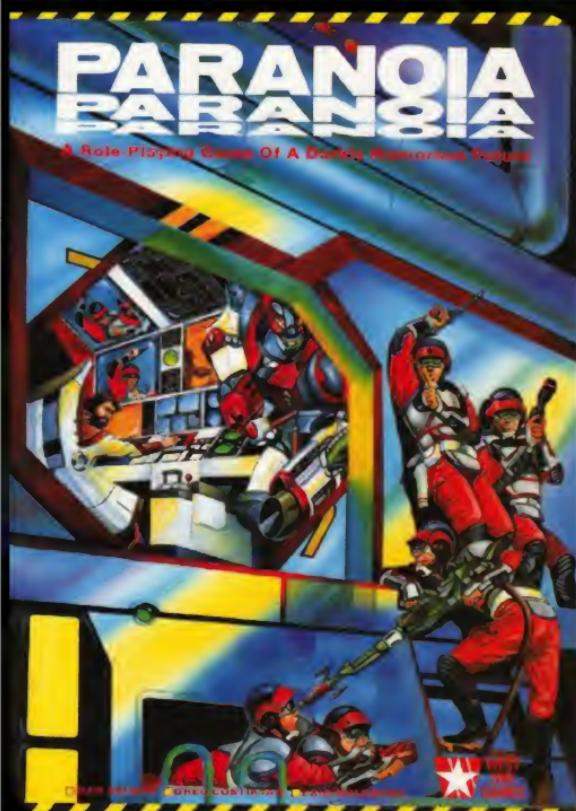
Last but not least, the three-game *Legends of Wrestling* series on the PS2 deserves a mention for putting together some of the most impressive rosters of real-life wrestlers ever assembled. Starting off slowly and ending pretty badly, *Legends of Wrestling 2* is the one to look out for. There's music by "Mouth of the South" Jimmy Hart, commentary from the three-man team of Tony Schiavone, Larry Zbysko and Bobby "The Brain" Heenan, more playable legends than you can handle, and a huge story mode based around the old territory system. Plus the European version of the game includes Big Daddy, Giant Haystacks, Kendo Nagasaki and Mick McManus as playable characters, which is a nice bonus.

In summary, *Fire Pro X Special*, *Here Comes the Pain*, *No Mercy*, *Legends of Wrestling 2* and *WCW SuperBrawl* just for the giggles. We'll move on to something completely different next issue. Tune in next month to find out what!



# ROLL FOR DAMAGE

ED FORTUNE  
GUIDES YOU  
THROUGH THE  
REALM OF  
TABLETOP GAMING



**G**Humour is hard. Improvising comedy is harder still, so much so that most actors consider improvisational comedy to not only be a separate skill set, but also one of the toughest to learn. So you would think that people would avoid trying to create funny tabletop roleplaying games, after all, there's nothing funny about trying to be funny and failing. Instead, one of the greatest RPGs ever written is pretty much a training manual for quick wits and dark humour; West End

Games' classic RPG, *Paranoia*.

The blurb on the back of the second edition *Paranoia* rulebook says, "Imagine a world designed by Kafka, Stalin, Orwell, Huxley, Sartre and the Marx Brothers..." and that's a pretty sweet description of the game. *Paranoia* is set in a post-apocalyptic world where humanity survives in a huge underground city called the Alpha Complex. The structure is ruled by an Artificial Intelligence known only as The Computer. Sadly, because all of

the people who programmed the great machine had radically different agendas, the poor thing is utterly crazy. Worse still, after the apocalypse happened (which is heavily implied to be nuclear in nature; this is a game from the '80s, after all), The Computer sought out a cause and found old 1950's Cold War propaganda and came to the only logical conclusion: communists must be responsible for everything that's gone wrong.

This has led The Computer to be paranoid and yet it still cares for its citizens, even though it's convinced they're all out to get it. As a consequence, it demands that all its citizens be happy, and failure to follow The Computer's orders is punishable by death.

Its paranoia has led to a hatred of all mutants and members of secret societies, which it refers to as 'Commie Mutant Traitors'. Unfortunately, it seems every person in the Alpha Complex has a secret mutant power. Oh, and everyone's joined a secret society, including the poor fool you play in the game. It's possible to reveal yourself as a traitor to the Alpha Complex in a hundred different ways and the consequences for doing so is always character death. With the stakes so high, it seems laughter is the only way out, though as The Computer has wisely cloned your character six times you can get straight back into it once you've been vapourised.

This might not sound like the set-up for one of the greatest humour games ever written, but the genius behind *Paranoia* is that the set-up creates innately absurd situations, in a true Catch-22 style. The players bullshit, backstab and bluff their way through encounters. Unlike a traditional RPG (in which the players are usually the scariest things out there), the characters are horribly disadvantaged on every level and some adventures don't even get past the mission brief before one of the characters says the wrong thing and everyone is turned in a pile of ash and smoking boots. Even if they survive the briefing, the next stage is usually requesting equipment.

As you might expect from a dystopian world, your chances of getting anything useful without a hefty bribe to the people who run the stores is minimal, and of course, bribery is a sign of being a Commie Mutant Traitor. You could always take your chances with Research and Design, a facility filled with helpful equipment such self-immolating hats, rocket boots and thermonuclear hand grenades. Again, telling the boffins that these death traps

are worse than useless is to doubt The Computer's wisdom, and that's punishable by death.

The missions themselves are also always certain doom. Be it negotiating with giant cockroaches or simply changing a light bulb, the players are bound to screw it up and end up killing their allies and probably getting themselves killed in the process.

Other comedy RPGs have been written since and the successful ones follow the same formula; rather than rely on the repetition of funny words and phrases or artificially 'comical' situations, *Paranoia* placed the players in bizarre and awkward positions, asking them to use their wits to escape certain doom. Similar games include *Kobolds Ate My Baby* and to a lesser extent, the original *Ghostbusters* RPG.

*Paranoia* holds a special place in my heart simply because it was the first roleplaying game I ever actually ran, back when I was 12 years old. I had no real idea what I was doing at the time. It was also the first RPG I actually bought for the grand price of £2.50 in one of the very few salles Games Workshop ever had. (*Paranoia*'s second edition was one of few RPGs that Games Workshop had owned the rights to publish in the UK). When GW decided that they were less about the fun and more about selling toy soldiers they sold all their RPGs off at a huge discount.) Its low price and easy availability lead to this darkly satirical game being on the bookshelves of any self-respecting gamer in the UK. Quite by accident, GW not only spread the game far and wide, it also led a generation of geeks to finding exactly who Kafka, Stalin, Orwell, Huxley, Sartre and the Marx Brothers actually were - which explains a lot about the state of the UK games industry when you think about it.

Though the second edition is perhaps the best known, the game has been through a boatload of revisions and changes. The first edition had some great ideas but suffered from overly complex, overly involved rules, and piles of forms for



hapless PCs to fill out, typically during the worst possible moments.

The second edition enjoyed a lot of success and given the nature of the setting, was originally designed without an arc-plot or campaign in mind. However, as players became cannier at surviving the whims of The Computer, gamers began to demand an actual story. West End Games spun out three story arcs for the second edition: *The Secret Society Wars*, which detailed all the factions getting what they wanted, an arc called *The Crash* (in which everything went predictably wrong) and *The Reboot*, in which everything was sort of fixed. The idea of these was sound and although the adventures had some solid ideas, it mostly fell flat, relying too firmly on 'wacky situations' rather than the black humour that made the game so popular in the first place.

Next up was 1995's *Paranoia Fifth Edition*. Because hilariously, they decided to skip two editions. The joke didn't go down well at all with the fans and neither did the game. The black humour had been

replaced with parodies of other games and the internal art and overall game design was awful. Whereas the second edition had the humour of an early Woody Allen movie, this version bore closer resemblance to the likes of *Scary Movie*. The game sank without a trace and has since been declared an "un-product" by its designers. The game's lack of success was one of the contributing factors to West End Games bankruptcy.

It wouldn't be till 2005 that Mongoose Games picked up the license and produced *Paranoia XP*, though it didn't take long for Microsoft to complain about the title and the name was shortened to *Paranoia*. Mongoose brought back the original designers as well as the bleak humour. It also contained rules and guidance for three different modes of play. Mode one, Zap is a satire-light, wackiness filled version for those who didn't get it. Mode two is called Classic and is the bleak yet funny game we all know and love. Finally, for those who really want to make their lives miserable, straight mode resembles something more akin to Orwell's 1984 than anything that resembles fun.

The current version of the game is the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition, which came out in 2009. In addition to slimmed down rules it contains different campaigns, allowing players to operate at different (but no less paranoid) levels of competence, from a low clearance Shooter to the much vaunted (but no less screwed) High Programmer.

It's the product of a lot of development and focuses mostly on the 'classic' mode style of play, with the other two relegated to the appendices. New books haven't been out for a while, but it seems you can't keep a good game down for long, and *Paranoia* deserves a place as one of the classics. +



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## STARBURST: EVENT PROFILE

# MCM MANCHESTER COMIC CON

WORDS: ED FORTUNE  
PHOTOS: ANNE DAVIES



**C**omic conventions have changed rapidly and radically over the last few years. Not only has the general public caught on to the idea that such things can be fun, there has been a growing interest in all things geek, from cosplay to comic books.

Manchester MCM Comic Con has risen to the challenge of this growing demand, interest has been so great in the past that this year's events was spread out to two days, and this benefitted both convention goers and the guests extremely well. The new layout included broader lanes and less choke points, as well as more content. The cosplayers were given their own space to hang out, as were the various signings and panels. The new layout also allowed the likes of the League of Legends tournament to draw its own crowd, which in turn let the MCM eSports commentators really go to town as they narrated some top class community focused videogame playing.

This year's event was also blessed with an enormous space for indie-comic book creators and the comics village was positioned in a prime position. This led to a great many smiling faces in the creative heart of the event as many of the artists and writers had not only sold a good number of their books but they had also picked up new fans. This also laid to rest growing concerns that amid all the cosplayers, TV and film stars and other attractions, that the actual source of inspiration for the event would be overlooked. Instead, this year's Manchester MCM Comic Con proved that it was still all about the comic books. Those merely after some unusual gifts or clever t-shirts were also well catered for.

The Saturday had the biggest draws when it came to guests: Chris Barrie, Robert Llewellyn Hattie Hayridge and Judy Pascoe from Red Dwarf happened to be on hand for panels and signings and were happy to

prove that the old magic was still there. The legendary Warwick Davies was as twinkly-eyed and as sharp as ever. Stuart Ashen, Dan Tomlinson and Riyad Barmania from YouTube movie Ashens and The Quest for The GameChild were also in attendance and teamed up with Llewellyn and Davies for an interesting discussion about the movie. Other guests included Game of Thrones actors James Cosmo and Ross Mullan.

Another strong draw was Bryce Papenbrook, the lead actor in hit anime show Attack on Titan. Bryce was on hand to deal with the horde of fans who have really taken to the dark and bizarre series. Certainly the most frequently seen cosplay of the weekend was the brown jacket and angel winged logo of the Scouting Legion from that cult show and Bryce clearly enjoyed the attention from the ever-growing fanbase.

The cosplayers had a great deal of fun and were everywhere. For many, this was their first event and MCM had provided multiple safe spaces for people to dress up and hang out. Everything from the semi-professional Rebel Legion, showing off their movie accurate Star Wars costumes, to people in the simplest of kit were present, and they all seemed to be having fun. The cosplay-orientated activities were carefully handled to prevent large crowds of people clogging up certain areas, making the entire experience stress-free for most.

An estimated 25,000 people turned up to join in on the fun on the Saturday, and being Manchester, it rained. This literally dampened the enthusiasm of the crowd but many braved the long queues to get in and enjoy the event. The Sunday was lighter, with only an estimated 15,000 in attendance but this meant swift queues and a much gentler and relaxed atmosphere.

Though the Sunday had less guests in attendance, this did not slow down the enthusiasm from Manchester's finest geeks. The overall event did perhaps suffer slightly from this, but those who were in attendance had clearly been selected with quality, rather than quantity in mind.

Manchester MCM Comic Con was a great improvement on last year's event, utilising every part of the Manchester Central venue. Given the huge demand in the North West for all things geeky and Manchester's ever growing control and influence over the UK's media output, it's hard to imagine this event ever getting smaller and it will be interesting to see how the ever-growing crowd is handled next year.

FOR INFORMATION ABOUT FUTURE MCM EXPO EVENTS VISIT:  
Website: [www.mcmcomiccon.com](http://www.mcmcomiccon.com)  
Twitter: @MCMExpo





## INTERVIEW: STUART ASHEN

WORDS: ED FORTUNE

**Comedian and actor STUART ASHEN is best known for his YouTube channel in which he reviews pound shop tat and dodgy electronic goods. We caught up with him at the recent MCM Manchester Comic Con to find out more about his latest action/adventure/comedy feature film, ASHEN'S AND THE QUEST FOR THE GAMECHILD and more...**

**STARBURST:** Tell us a little bit about *Ashens and the Quest for The GameChild*?

Stuart: Certainly, *The Quest for The GameChild* is a partially crowdfunded film that we released onto YouTube in August 2013. Directed by Riyad Barmania and co-written by him and myself, it is the story of a slightly odd man who is obsessed with a very specific old video game device that he wants to add to his considerable collection of vintage tat. So he goes off on a quest with a failed corporate mascot and on their way they meet some odd characters and discover that the GameChild had more to it than they thought.

**How did you make the transition from reviews on YouTube to feature films?**

I'd always done bits and pieces of sketch comedy in the past, but something of this scale is a step up. We had an idea for something that would lead on from a review for some time. We did a short science fiction thing called *The Proxy* that led in quite nicely from one of my reviews into something more scripted. We have all these people who can do cool stuff, so we meshed together ideas and made a film. It worked out better than we expected!

**How did you get Robert Llewellyn and Warwick Davies to come aboard?**

Robert is the nicest man in the world so that's always an easy call. The production company was working with him on one of his series, so that worked out quite nicely. The YouTube channel we originally did the film for is called *The Multiverse*, which is part of Channel Flip, and Warwick is the public face of that so he was keen to be involved.

**Is a sequel planned for *GameChild*?**

That's something we never really thought of; the movie has gained such a life of its own. The fandom has been fantastic and it's blown us away. It's reached a much wider audience. At London MCM we had 300 Blu-rays and they sold in a few hours, we had nothing left for the weekend. We've had a couple of cinema screenings and they also sold out in a few hours. So with that sort of traction we might be able to do a sequel. No firm plans as yet.

**Would you consider crowdfunding again?**

41% of the budget came from crowdfunding with the first one. I don't know; it's too early to make a decision on that.

**If I've seen the movie on YouTube, why should I buy the DVD?**

Well, firstly you get a fantastic box for your shelf. But obviously it's an extended cut with a few extra bits and bobs and it's been remastered and rejigged. There's a lot of extras on it as well.

**What possessed you to start reviewing pound shop tat?**

It started by accident. I did a short video to demonstrate a cheap device I had and someone forwarded it on to B3ta and it got thousands of views. This was back in the day before YouTube, it was all downloads.

**What would be your dream project?**

More films, or longer-form television would be interesting, using the 30-minute format. I'd like to do another film, then a TV series and then I'd like to live on a yacht.

**What would your dream cast be?**

I would want every person cast as Nicolas Cage in a variety of wigs and facial expressions. The same voice though.

*Stuart's videos and future projects can be found at [www.ashens.com](http://www.ashens.com). You can read our review of ASHEN'S AND THE QUEST FOR THE GAMECHILD on page 79.*



## The Diary by Rylan Cavell

Lightening regularly struck the church in our village. Storms would light up the night and thunder was forever rolling across the hills and over the valleys. This was commonplace.

Legends and folk tales surrounded the church; saying it was haunted, or possessed by a demon.

True it was a scary old place. Half collapsed and crooked, it cut an eerie silhouette against the daytime skyline. According to some it was built on the site of the very first Christian temple in the UK, but the National Trust wouldn't touch it with a barge pole, so it was somewhat unlikely.

One night a particularly fierce storm raged. Lightening like fireworks struck the church again and again. Even by the standards we were used to, this was a dramatic spectacle.

My mother knitted in the corner, paying no attention.

'The heavens really have it in for that old church,' grumbled my father, peering over his reading glasses and out of the window. We lived a short walk from the church, and our living room window gave us a front-row seat to the show. This was where I regularly sat; cross-legged on the wide window sill.

### CRACK

The storm ended. The sound took us all by surprise; making my mother drop her knitting and me to launch myself backward from the window. I didn't manage to uncross my legs, and ended up a tangled mess on the floor.

'What was that?' My mother said, clutching her pearls.

The final flash of light from the sky had shattered what remained of the church. As the darkness cleared and moonlight lit the hilltops, we saw the church had been reduced to little more than a pile of rubble. Ancient masonry undone by the elements. Some small sections of wall still remained, and the point of the spire lay toppled and smashed.

'That storm's ended swiftly.' My father remarked, and it was true. The sky glittered with stars, unseen of a night-time in these parts for as long as anyone could remember.

The storms had ended and the church was gone.

The next week it was a constant topic of conversation.

'What does it mean?'  
'We've made God unhappy!'  
'The Devil is rising! It's the end of days.'  
'Could it be global warming?'

But not one single person had dared to go up there. The superstitions lay heavy on everyone, they dared not approach. Very few had gone near it in living memory, it was dangerous. Falling bricks could do you a mischief. Some said it was a shock it stood for as long as it did, given how unstable it was reported to be.

I was curious. One afternoon, after peering out of the window at that pile of rubble for several hours, I decided to go and see it up close.

Hat, coat and boots on, I left the house and began to make my way up the hill.

Cold wind swept over the moorland, whipping at my face. The occasional bleat of a sheep or a goat could be heard from the local farms. They were distant and warped sounds; the wind made them change pitch and confuse the direction in which they'd come. I walked for ten minutes, and didn't seem to be making any progress. It had never looked this far away from the house.

I continued walking for another ten minutes, and still it was as far away from me as it had been when I set off.

'This is silly.' I said to myself.

I looked back at the town, which seemed a lot further away than it should have done. I considered turning back, and giving up. Sighing, I took a last glance at the church debris before retreating... but it was now right in front of me. It was all around me. I was stood amongst the bricks, tiles, pillars and shattered ironwork.

I breathed deeply, taking in my surroundings, trying to stay calm.

'Weird...'

The building had fallen in on itself. Pillars stuck up at strange angles from the crumpled arches and sloped piles of dusty rubble. I had never seen this close to a church before. Were they all decorated as badly as this one? Every surface was festooned with gaudy carvings. Ugly faces peered from the remains. Viciously scowling cherubs, wide-mouthed serpents and horned gargoyles lay everywhere.

'Whoever carved these nasty-looking decorations had some serious issues.' I said as I ran a hand tentatively across the back of the nearest gargoyle. Its spine was lumpy, its arms tight at its chest and its face; with outward-pointed teeth and downturned eyes looked every bit a deranged monstrosity.

It's hands were clawed and... they were clutching something.

A metal box.

I probed at it with a finger but could not prise it from the stony grip of the gargoyle.

My curious mind was piqued. I looked around, and found what seemed a suitably sharp and heavy stone. Taking it to one of the wrists, a few forceful strikes was all it took. The hand fell away.

With that one hand removed, the box was now easy to get at.

Tugging it free, I prised it open. Within the box was a book.

I sat upon the back of the gargoyle and opened the cracked leather binding to reveal the first page. In ink-splattered, handwritten script were the words;

*The Diary Of Corvus Bone.*

It was in Welsh. But an old form of the language. Luckily I had learned enough to make sense of what was written. The handwriting was terrible, but decipherable. This diary began with the journey of Corvus Bone, a man converted to Christianity from Paganism, and seemingly set on a Holy Mission. There were lots of notes on biblical passages, lots of Old Testament stuff. I recognised them from religious education class at school. It was all very dull, and it struck me as peculiar that this diary should have

been kept so securely within the grasping claws of one of the church's carved grotesques. Was it a sacred artefact, long lost to the world?

I flicked forward a few pages...

and here is where it got a little interesting.

...This land does remain the final strong-hold of the Ancient Spirits. Banished from Eden and the Kingdoms of Heaven, they find sanctuary on these accursed shores. The King of these lands, a man of great stature, commands the very birds in the air. He will not see nor speak with me. He sent Ravens to peck at me and drive me away from his castle gate...

Clearly this man was one of the early Christian pioneers in the area. Perhaps it was he who built the church. Perhaps it was his religious fervour that drove him to carving such gruesome creatures into the very fabric of the church. I flicked forward a few more pages and continued to read.

...She secured me entrance to the Castle. I prayed to the Lord for forgiveness for my sins and for my deceit. I searched high and low through that vast building but did not locate it. The library was vast, containing books in many tongues that I could not read and did not recognise...

What had he been searching for? I quietly read back over the pages I had skipped. Not once did it mention what he sought.

The wind was softening slowly, but the cold still bit at my fingers, making them stiff and slow to move. Still I read on.

...They came at me in the night. I fought them off with fire and Holy Water. It burned their skin. The light burned their eyes. They are creatures of the dark. Creatures that know nothing of Heaven. I must save this land, and myself, from them...

He really believed he was under physical attack. Nightmares can be vivid, and I wondered how stable this man's mind had been.

There seemed to be a long period where no entries were made, and then on one page was scrawled:

I have it!

I remained clueless as to what 'it' was.

...They are of the air, of the earth, of the trees, of fire and of the animals. All are represented by their spirit counterparts. This world is split between light and dark. I must shed the cloak of night that King Brun keeps secure over his kingdom. I must be as a beacon. Now I know the nature of these spirits, now I understand them - I can truly fight them.

Corvus Bone wanted to fight the pagan faith. He literally wanted to fight the spirits. He clearly believed them to have physical form. Many pages now were spoiled. Stained a strange brown colour, the ink had run and ruined the words. Some passages could just be made out.

...I cannot kill them. They have no soul, and do not live as I understand it. I must find another way to battle the Demons and Spirits and free this land...

...find a prison. They will be captive forevermore, their powers bound...

...use a piece of the cauldron against them. An object designed by man, forged by spirits and blessed by my Holy Water...

...Its power will now obey me. The other shards are scattered, buried and lost. I am ready. All is prepared. Tonight I shall accomplish my Holy Mission...

And there the words ended. The remainder of the pages were blank.

I felt oddly sorry for Corvus Bone. Living out in this desolate place and following a new religion that no others subscribed to must have left him so alone. The imagination is a powerful tool, but it can turn on you. The monster under the bed, the shadow that moves. Figments.

Corvus Bone was evidently a tormented soul. I truly felt sorry for him.

Spirits? Demons? Even I didn't believe in those things. They were the stuff of fairy stories and fables.

I looked down at the gargoyle upon whose back I sat.

'Spirits and demons.' I said, 'it's all so silly.'

The gargoyle grabbed hold of my ankle. I yelped in surprise, falling away from it.

'I wouldn't say that.' it replied, grinning.

My mind was suddenly numb.

'What are you?' I stuttered.

'Free, at last... and very hungry.'

All about me the church was moving. Claws and wings and teeth and arms and crooked bodies emerged from the debris.

The gargoyle licked its lips and moved closer...



Art: Rylan Cavell

# PAUL MOUNT'S



**Work-in-progress this month as we look at the new series of C4's controversial *Utopia*, check in on the latest seasons of *True Blood* and *Falling Skies*, and gawp in disbelief at Syfy's distinctly fishy *Sharknado 2: The Second One...***

The recent second series of C4's cult conspiracy theory/geeks-ahoy drama *Utopia* kicked up quite a stink in the stupider corners of the British Popular Press who found plenty of hot air to spew about a show they hadn't seen and would not watch but felt entirely justified in being offended by on everyone else's behalf. Now, I enjoyed the first season of *Utopia* but I had to dig out issue 387 to find out why as I could hardly remember a thing about it. This sort of thing happens when you hit rock bottom, apparently. Now where did I leave my keys??

As it turned out, I needn't have bothered with a crash catch-up course because - after an extraordinary first episode featuring none of the show's regular cast but providing some wonderful (and much-needed) backstory to the events underpinning the entire show - episode two provided a handy 'Previously on *Utopia*' recap which brought me right up to speed. Newbies might not have had such an easy time, though; to say that *Utopia* is a dense, complex and demanding show is an understatement on a par with suggesting that Jedward aren't that much cop. Once again I have to berate you, dear reader - yes, you - because, like *In The Flesh* last month, you're staying away from *Utopia* in droves. *Utopia's* first run wasn't exactly a runaway hit, but as a 'prestige' drama with a cult audience (and a clearly unfinished story) C4 obviously felt it was worthy of a second bite of the cherry. Maybe it was the show's hysterical pre-publicity from the increasingly manic 'Daily Mail', (based on elements of the first episode of series two which cast a new, fictional and slightly controversial light on certain real-life political figures from the 1970s) which turned people off or maybe just the fact that people found the show too challenging the first time around. Whatever the reason, *Utopia* is barely pulling in half-

a-million for its second series and that, my friends, is nothing short of tragic...

All the hallmarks of season one are back in season two. Stunning, imaginative direction (none of the 'pointing the camera at people and letting them act' stuff of so much British TV drama), disconcertingly-brutal violence (I've already lost count of the number of people who've been shot in the head with spectacularly blood-spraying results), intense, powerful performances from an outstanding cast and scripts which really make you work to keep up. The bold first episode takes us back to the 1970s when young scientist Philip Carvel (Tom Burke) is developing the Janus virus which can inhibit the human reproductive process. Carvel sees it as a way to potentially end the curse of world food shortages by ultimately

bringing down the world's population but, as we learnt in the first series, the sinister Network have been working for years towards an altogether different end. They plan to unleash a lethal Russian flu virus across the Earth and then disseminate the cure - in the form of the Janus virus - which will bring down the population to what they see as a more manageable figure. Steps have to be taken to avoid the catastrophe of a starving planet which could be just decades away...

Episode one brilliantly answers many questions and clarifies many plot points left hanging or raised at the end of the first series, particularly in relation to the cold, emotionless killer known as Arby (Neil Maskell) but whose real name is Pietre. We also learn the truth about the origins of the enigmatic Jessica Hyde (Fiona O'Shaughnessy) and much, much more about the origins of the Janus virus. The recreation of 1970s Britain, battered by strikes and political discontent, is flawless and the script daringly rewrites history and piles conspiracy theory upon conspiracy theory. The episode effortlessly sets up the rest of the series - we're four episodes in at the time of writing - and our ragtag bunch of nerds and geeks from the first series are back on the run and the stakes are getting higher week after week.

The narrative of *Utopia* is actually a little bit more linear for this second series, perhaps because now the line has been straightened out; we know all the characters and their histories, the plot's been fully opened up and we know broadly where the show is taking us if not what's waiting when we get to the end point. The show is a dazzling mixture of uber-violent art-house thriller, shoot-'em-up pot-boiler, with a dollop of high concept sci-fi woven in for good measure. Characters are uniformly unlikeable - there's no-one much to really root for - and in Lee (Paul Ready), the Network's hitman (he's the guy who gouged someone's eye out with a spoon in season one) - who makes a miraculous return from the dead in season two - we have one of TV's most unnerving and implacable killers.

*Utopia* works and is television to cherish





and nurture because it's just so unlike anything on TV anywhere at the moment and it's certainly like nothing British TV has produced in the last ten years, even in this vaguely more fantasy-friendly environment. I'm frustrated that more people aren't watching and that more people aren't talking about it, but the very fact that it exists and has survived into a second season is a quiet testament to the fact that people out there are still interested in making innovative, challenging TV regardless of how few people sit down and try to wrap their brains around it.

*Utopia* is probably my TV show of the year so far and I'll make no premature apology for returning to write about its final two episodes next month. For now, I'll just implore you to catch up with it if you can; it'll repay your efforts in spades...

#### TRUE BLOOD

I bailed out of HBO's *True Blood* at the end of season four if I recall correctly. I'd never really caught the Bon Temps bug and the show's mixture of completely unerotic sex scenes, relentless cussing and daffy character relationships left me unmoved. But the show was a fun watch and for the first three years I wasn't yet sick to death of vampires, fangs, blood and all the clichés. But having turned away from the show in later years I decided that the least I could do was to pay my respects as it embarks on its final, ten-episode season. Much to my surprise, I'm actually quite enjoying it and am quite inclined to stick around to the bitter end.

*True Blood* seems to have grown up. It spent two or three years behaving like an excitable teenager, trying to make as much fuss as it could by being as loud and unsubtle as possible, throwing around increasingly-ludicrous ideas and character arcs (I still can't get over the 'Sookie-is-a-fairy' revelation) and just getting a bit carried away by its own apparent popularity and its feverish desire to shock. But this last season appears to be a different beast. The show is a bit slower than I recall, a bit more contemplative. The characters

are all looking a bit older (vampire Bill's dyed jet-black hair is a hoot) and the show feels a bit tired, aware that the end is in sight. But it's going out with some of its dignity back. The main storyline this year seems to involve the rampage of gangs of diseased vampires - no ludicrous Big Bad supernatural super-villain this year - and Bon Temps falling into chaos under the sheer weight of its shape-shifting, blood-sucking, mind-reading inhabitants.

*True Blood* 7 is actually a more melancholic series and, instead of bombarding its viewers with frantic action sequences (there are still a few here and there) and silly storylines, it's focussing a bit more on its characters, the journey they've been on and the way it's affected them all. Anna Paquin's Sookie ("Sookie!!") is the most damaged of the lot; she's lost friends, family, various boyfriends (another one gets offed in this season) and she seems to be coming to terms with her place in the universe, her damaged relationship with vampire Bill (Stephen Moyer) and all those around her who've been touched by

her actions and decisions in the past. The show is clearly setting itself up for the finale and it's taking its time, developing the backstories of some of its many core characters (the opening credits contain twenty-three named featured actors!) whilst moving the arcs of others towards their conclusion.

Less outrageous than it's been in the recent past, *True Blood*'s rediscovering its earlier form and subtlety as it enters the home straight, an affecting and occasionally-emotional supernatural series about people living, sometimes uncomfortably, side-by-side with monsters. Just a shame it hasn't always been this way and that *True Blood* veered so manically from the path in the middle of its run but at least it's looking to end its life with its reputation restored. Fangs for the memories (sorry, it's late).

#### FALLING SKIES

Season four of the Spielberg exec-produced post-alien invasion drama *Falling Skies* is currently trundling along on its merry way and it's pretty much business as usual. I've remarked before that this is a show that's just there; consistently entertaining and always watchable, it just does what it does with brisk efficiency but with no potential for it to ever hit it out of the park and take its storytelling to the next level.

So it goes with this new season. The first episode kicks off with Tom Mason (Noah Wyle) and his shambolic group of survivors making their way back to their new home at Charleston. They're suddenly attacked by a wave of alien Esphehi ships and mechs (their mechanised Terminator-like warriors); some of the humans are killed, some are captured (including Tom) and others are imprisoned behind an impenetrable green force field. Then the show does its usual infuriating trick - it jumps forward four months - and the disparate groups are struggling to survive and/or escape. Tom's partner Anne (Moon Bloodgood) is on the outside trying to find Tom and their daughter Lexi, an alien/





human hybrid who has matured into a twenty-one-year-old within the space of a year; Tom is, as ever, trying to mobilise the rebel forces and his youngest son Matt is trapped in an alien confinement camp which preaches human/Espenri comradeship.

Lots going on in *Falling Skies*, as always, and the show brilliant captures the dreary, grey devastation of a world under an alien jackboot. But none it really matters much; plot contrivances happen just to drag out an episode or a story arc, victories are always small, the stakes never really change. *Falling Skies* just rumbles along in its own way but it's now starting to look a bit weary and jaded; a series which never quite knew how to fulfil its potential and deliver on its premise.

But *Falling Skies* is never a disgrace, it's always extremely earnest (perhaps too earnest) and well-meaning but it does seem to be running out of steam. Next year's tenth-episode fifth season has been confirmed as its last and I think it's just as well. Having stuck with it since the start I'm hoping the

show can pull something special out of the bag and deliver a final run which delivers on the show's promise at last. See you this time next year...

## SHARKNADO 2: THE SECOND ONE

Blockbuster movie of the year? You may well think that *Dawn of the Planet of the Apes* was top banana, *Guardians of the Galaxy* blasted it out of orbit or perhaps even... I pity you... *Transformers 4: Will It Ever End?* changed your life. I say 'pah' to you all. You need to see Syfy's latest incredible offering, *Sharknado 2: The Second One*, if you hope to ever really understand what a modern blockbuster movie can and should be. Razor-sharp, literate script, breathtaking and potentially Emmy-winning acting, revolutionary state-of-the-art special effects... *Sharknado 2* has none of these. It is, in fact, twaddle of the very highest order and it's surely the most magnificently ridiculous thing I've ever seen (and I've seen myself naked, remember) but it ranks right

at the top of 'things not to miss in 2014' - if such a list were to exist.

*Sharknado 2* delivers the same mix of laughable thrills and spills as last year's first effort. This time, though, deadly tornados have sucked up thousands of sharks and are about to deposit them all over New York City. Fortunately, Fin Shepard (Ian Ziering) and his ex-wife April Wexler (Tara Reid, her face apparently botoxed to the point of frozen) arrive in the city after their plane is brought down by sharks flung out from the tornado (Kelly Osbourne's air stewardess character gets eaten, so it's not all bad news). Thanks to their similar experiences in LA last year, the pair are able to lead the charge in protecting the city from the terror of sharks dropping randomly out of the sky.

Utter nonsense from beginning to end, *Sharknado 2* does at least have its tongue in its cheek, from a witty soft rock theme tune to the sly reference to a classic *Twilight Zone* episode. No-one's taking this at all seriously and when the appalling CGI sharks and their habit of randomly decapitating everyone they fall on gets too much to bear, there's amusement to be had from the minor celebrity cameos - Judd Hirsch, Robert 'Airplane' Hays and Wil Wheaton all turn up to join the fun. At the end of the film, our hero Shepard is caught in the eye of the storm and hitches a ride upon a hurtling shark which he then uses to surf back to the safety of the Empire State Building viewing gallery (but not before throwing himself into the shark's gullet and cutting himself on the other end). Magnificent.

That's enough about *Sharknado 2*; I'm in danger of giving it a credibility it doesn't deserve (or even, I suspect, want). It's rubbish and it knows it's rubbish and it'll be on a loop on Syfy until next year's already-promised *Sharknado 3* if you fancy giving it a whirl. That's it for this month. Fin. +

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# it's only a movie

a column by JORDAN ROYCE

Welcome to the opening session of my Michael Bay Clinic. I intend to hold the occasional session from time to time to afford underground Bay users an opportunity to come to terms with your affliction. I hope that eventually you can look in the mirror and freely admit to yourselves that upon occasion you have actually enjoyed some of his movies.

Michael Benjamin Bay holds the distinction of being probably the most polarising director of big budget genre movies – ever! I have certainly never experienced such a dichotomy between the success of a person's product, and the perceived success in the eyes of their primary critics. Michael Bay may be a studio money-making powerhouse but man oh man does he reap the hatred from the fanboy element. Even serious reviewers just can't help themselves. Months before the release of *Transformers: Age of Extinction* the negativity on the STARBURST Twitter feed was reaching fever pitch. Any sign that you were even remotely looking forward to this latest instalment (even out of curiosity) was met with vitriol. So where is all this hate coming from and is it really warranted?

When dissecting some of these criticisms there are many repetitions. The primary complaints are that Bay was schooled in music videos (I don't recall David Fincher ever having to face that abuse). Another popular stance, that he is style over substance, is again lost on me. That critique could be leveled at the most prolific arse-house directors of our time. However, I do share the discomfort over the level of product placement. I can give the haters a pass on that one, but I think that is an inevitable by-product of his main addictions – extreme special effects, and stunt set pieces. Someone has to pay to have so much on screen. Maybe less is more, but Michael Bay just doesn't think so, leaving him wide open to criticism regarding his over-the-top method of filmmaking, affectionately (and in equal measure insultingly) branded 'Bayhem'. Then we hit the sensitive nature of his sexist predilections. His leading ladies do tend to be of a certain IQ and body type, and he certainly does not ignore the visual opportunities they present him with. Whilst I agree we should have moved on by now, Megan Fox's short stint as a car mechanic was enjoyed by teens to the same extent



*Michael Bay, ramming something into Nicola Peltz..*

that the masses couldn't get enough of subway vents in *The Seven Year Itch*. Bay didn't invent hormones, but he isn't a hypocrite about it in any way.

Bay arrived in our stomping grounds with *Armageddon* back in 1998. At this stage some sci-fi fans were still openly exhibiting external signs of enjoyment when watching films that were just a bit of dumb fun. In fact I would go so far as to say that had George Pal been a young man in the 1990s, these are exactly the type of movies he would have been making. Ones that simply set out to entertain people, tell a simple story, and dazzle us all with the latest special effects.

Bay really messed things up with his next sci-fi excursion. 2005's *The Island* was his attempt at making everyone happy, and this time no-one was! The core story of clones bred for organ replacement is straight out of a Dickens dystopia, and seems to clash with the later trademarked Bay excesses, including some breathtaking liberties taken with product placement again, and yes, I am referring to that Eternity ad! This was the pivotal moment when the fanboy got his knickers in a twist and labeled Bay as a maker of bad, and often embarrassing, movies. Bay was on his way to becoming

a lazy punch bag for any blogger with not much to write about, and a few cheap shots to unload. When shortly afterwards I heard that Bay had bagged the *Transformers* gig I really did not expect the amount of negativity that the news brought.

I was actually more sceptical about the need to make it in the first place. To me it had novelty flick written all over it. I had really liked *The Transformers: The Movie*, which was an enjoyable way to expand upon the animated series, and the Marvel comics version. So I couldn't see the point, other than the initial curiosity of seeing how the Autobots themselves could be realised in live-action. It was just such a stupid premise. It was always a toy that didn't stand up to any scrutiny mythologically. Even young children knew the score. They were really fun toys that looked cool, and were addictively collectable. You were never going to make *War and Peace* out of this. Bay was as good as anyone to have a stab at it. As it turned out it was a pretty good stab. *Transformers* I enjoyed on exactly the terms it was pitched. Importantly, kids loved it. A resounding \$709 million would tend to underline this. As the sequels rolled out, the following two movies would increase this total to over \$3.6 BILLION, cementing them



**Something wasn't quite right on the set of Dawn of the Planet of the Apes. Quick, send for those makeup guys!"**

as one of the most successful movie franchises in the history of cinema. All this accompanied with an overwhelmingly negative wave of fanboy hate with each successive instalment. So what did I think of this new'un, and what can you make of all this contradiction?

**Transformers: Age of Extinction** is a long movie, and by now Depp and Co have pretty much instilled a Pavlovian hatred of them in me. Having said that, I did enjoy it, and I had a good time. I was entertained, whilst not being particularly improved in any way as a human being by its content. As with **Transformers: Dark of the Moon**, they actually make good use of the 3D of which I am usually not fussed about as a medium any more, after a string of useless (and lifeless) cheapo conversions. It manages to surpass the difficulties of being the first movie in a trilogy that is itself a sequel to a preceding trilogy. Surprisingly, this movie also doesn't suffer from introducing a host of new human characters, and in particular Mark Wahlberg is a stronger leading man. Although he comes across as way too thick to even fix a broken washing machine, never mind indulging in advanced robotics! Nicola Peltz plays a 17-year-old whose legs can be used to frame shots, so that's that box ticked. But Stanley Tucci does stand out and reminds me yet again why I like to see this guy in movies. As the tech-obsessed Joshua Joyce who wants to make his own toy box of **Transformers**, his character does serve to keep the movie's tongue firmly in its cheek. With his 'Doctor Frankenstein from Silicon Valley' routine counterbalancing pretty straight approaches to menace provided by Kelsey Grammer and Titus Welliver. I would argue that I found the human antics in this movie to actually be pretty watchable. Except for one person. Jack Reynor. A six-foot, Red Bull sponsored leprechaun straight from the Sam Worthington school of drama. In a movie populated mainly by funny looking giant robots it really takes a special actor to stand out as an unconvincing

performance. Yet Jack manages it with gusto. Still in a cast this size there has to be a dud somewhere. But jeez, that is one weird 'Irish' accent, and he is Irish.

Special effects are knocked up quite a few notches, and thankfully remain consistently good throughout. The Dinobots in particular being well realised, whilst bonkers to look at. I am curious what the army of critics thought would be the correct 'approach' with these guys. It does underline the strange nature of tearing these movies to such finite shreds when assessing them.

Overall it's a solid entry in the franchise. I still think **Transformers: Dark of the Moon** is the best so far, but I found it to be a distracting piece of cine-fluff. So why all the hate? I just think a lot of genre fans are scared of enjoying childish movies like this. If you were eight years old you would be lapping this up. The difference is that when we were eight years old watching movies like these, we didn't have to sit near some thirty-something tittie tutting and moaning about their Dinobots, and how George Lucas had raped their childhood. We were able to get on with having one of our own.

Now that me and Kris are having our summer break from STARBURST Radio, I did manage six days in Cyprus hoping for a quiet time, and to recharge some batteries. Sadly, it culminated in a broken speedboat and me being swept out to sea. I was eventually retrieved, thus saving everyone the trouble of removing my name from the credits page of the mag. But in the slightly darker moments of waiting to be rescued I thought, 'Bugger! Now I'm not going to get to see that Apes sequel!'

For those of us that cannot get in touch with our inner Bay, **Dawn of the Planet of the Apes** has turned up just in time to deliver a massive genre hit that currently seems to be pleasing just about everybody. This second instalment had a tough act to follow, and yet it has actually surpassed its predecessor in literally every area. Aside from the occasional, rare moment, there is

no doubt that every creature on screen is as real as their human co-stars. In particular, the character of Koba and his 'cheeky monkey' antics will have your jaw dropping on the floor. Director Matt Reeves should be commended for the pitch perfect tone and pacing of this follow-up. If **Rise** was a remake of **Conquest of the Planet of the Apes**, then it was only natural to follow this with a remake of **Battle for the Planet of the Apes** which was problematically seen as the weakest of the original five movies. Wisely, **Dawn** does not follow the original plot too closely, and manages to tell the evolutionary journey of Caesar and his 'family' of apes as they lock horns with the rapidly fading light of humanity on Earth. It genuinely is genre cinema at its finest. So how does Matt Reeves top this? Well, bearing in mind that the astronauts (including Taylor?) are still missing. It seems certain that we are going to actually end this saga where the original began. Bring it on! That is one remake of **Planet of the Apes** that could actually be better than the original classic.

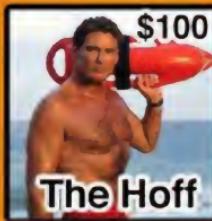
Unfortunately not everyone is happy in Apes Central as we have been subjected to some unpopular Serkis antics. Further to my earlier assessment of Mr Andrew Serkis as a one trick pony that earns money from wearing a wetsuit covered with tennis balls where his bollocks should be (an opinion voiced on numerous occasions to my long suffering radio co-host Kris Heys), I am indeed eating a copious amount of humble pie. He has certainly done wonders with the Caesar characterisation. But it seems we needed this process explaining in more detail. Prior to the movie's release, Serkis did the rounds explaining that the geniuses at WETA Digital were merely, "painting digital makeup onto actor's performances". Blimey, even Caesar didn't beat his own chest that loudly! When questioned about who is actually responsible for the astounding performances in his movie, director Matt Reeves was far more diplomatic, feeling that both parties deserve equal recognition; "There's Best Performance by an Actor, and that's what Andy does. And there are Best Special Effects in a Motion Picture and that's what WETA does. Those two categories already exist. And both of them I think are at the top of their form."

I think that is a fair assessment of the situation as this type of performance is certainly changing the face of genre cinema, and it would be a shame if the guys behind Caesar's visual aesthetic were to be overshadowed. Makeup artists never spent thousands of hours in front of a monitor making sure we believed in the impossible. It's more than just making someone with talent look good.

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